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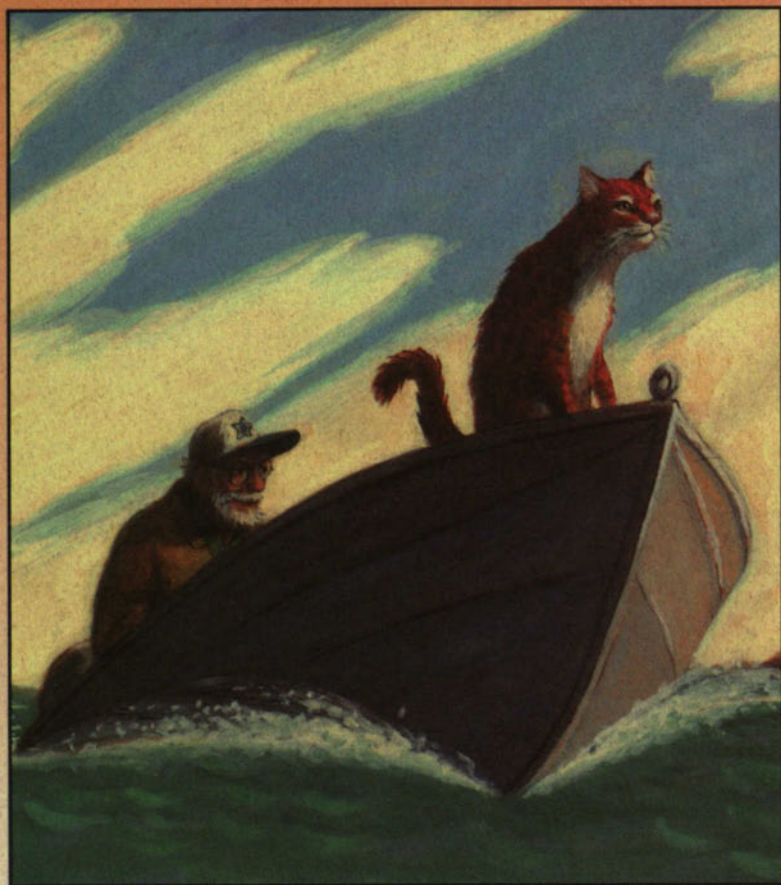
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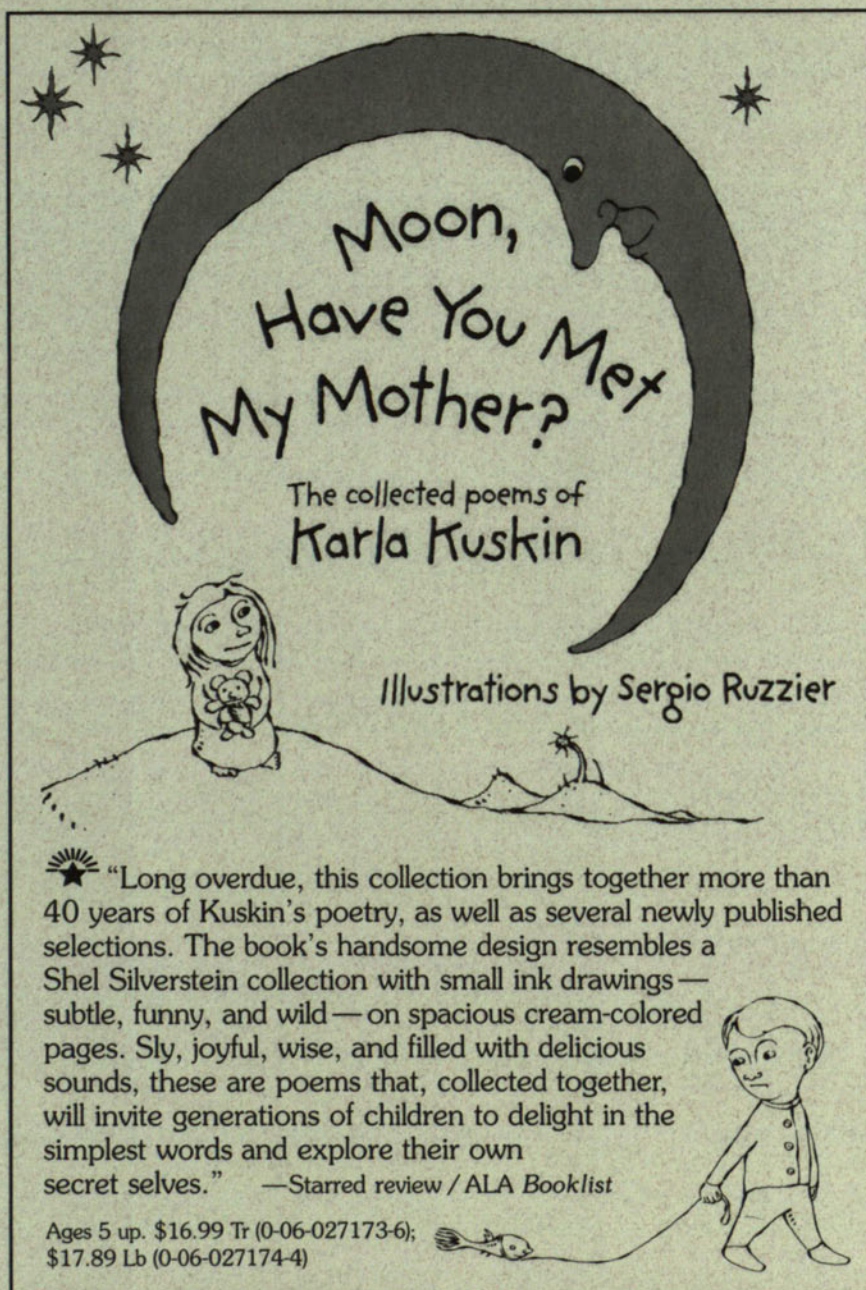
THE BULLETIN

OF THE CENTER FOR CHILDREN'S BOOKS

June 2003
Vol. 56 No.10



University of Illinois
Graduate School of Library and Information Science



★ “Long overdue, this collection brings together more than 40 years of Kuskin’s poetry, as well as several newly published selections. The book’s handsome design resembles a Shel Silverstein collection with small ink drawings—subtle, funny, and wild—on spacious cream-colored pages. Sly, joyful, wise, and filled with delicious sounds, these are poems that, collected together, will invite generations of children to delight in the simplest words and explore their own secret selves.” —Starred review / ALA Booklist

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T H E B U L L E T I N

OF THE CENTER FOR CHILDREN'S BOOKS

June 2003
Vol. 56 No. 10



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EXPLANATION OF CODE SYMBOLS USED WITH REVIEWS

*	Asterisks denote books of special distinction.
R	Recommended.
Ad	Additional book of acceptable quality for collections needing more material in the area.
M	Marginal book that is so slight in content or has so many weaknesses in style or format that it should be given careful consideration before purchase.
NR	Not recommended.
SpC	Subject matter or treatment will tend to limit the book to specialized collections.
SpR	A book that will have appeal for the unusual reader only. Recommended for the special few who will read it.

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Cover illustration by Barry Root from *The Cat Who Liked Potato Soup* ©2003. Used by permission of Candlewick Press.

THE BIG PICTURE

The Cat Who Liked Potato Soup

by Terry Farish; illus. by Barry Root

Picture-book artists tend to get most of the glory in the picture-book partnership, but a truly fine picture-book text is a thing of beauty in its own right, achieving things that pictures can't (even as the art achieves things that the text can't) rather than functioning merely as punctuation or captioning. Though it's a demanding format, with its need for compactness and for partnership, there are those that excel at it: Margaret Wise Brown, Arthur Yorinks, Jacqueline Briggs Martin, to name a few. Now Terry Farish demonstrates herself an exciting new talent in the genre with this casually told yet tender tale about the prickly friendship between an old man and his cat.

The old man used to have lots of cats, leaving him largely indifferent to any particular individual, but now he lives with just the one, "who he liked, but not so's you'd notice." She's no hunter, instead warmly appreciating the old man's potato soup and enjoying riding along in the boat on his fishing trips ("The cat sat on the bow of the boat, her face into the wind, like she was a hood ornament"). One day, the two squabble: when the cat refuses to desert the warm bed in the morning (the old man had finally installed an electric blanket), the sulking codger goes fishing without her; when he returns home, he finds a catless house. Eventually, though, the insulted kitty returns, bearing a considerably larger fish than the old man's usual catches, and the properly humbled old man treats her with the appreciation he'd hitherto hidden: "And he loved the sight of her, oh, and this time you'd notice."

Farish's deliberately easygoing text takes an engaging story and turns it into a finely fashioned saga of wry humor and delicate emotion. Her understated colloquialisms allow the story to shine through the rustic flavor (seeking the errant cat, the old man "looked in all his rooms. He had three"), and her carefully crafted structure strengthens the impact ("She did not come home for lunch. She did not come home for supper"). These days picture-book prose finds it difficult to resist artistically ragged right margins (perhaps hoping that it will lighten some leaden prose), but here that arrangement packs a subtle but effective punch, the deliberate placement giving the succinct phraseology a silent shaping rhythm that will add atmosphere to readalouds as well. At the center of all this is the relationship of the undemonstrative old man and his longtime pet. Their regular conversations have an air of homely bickering about them, and since the cat's portion of these exchanges depends strongly on the old man's interpretation and understanding (the returned cat "opened her mouth and howled for a long time. The old man had trouble making out the details of her story"), the narrative dexterously dabbles its toes in the water of fantasy while never quite leaving reality's shores; most pet owners will relate to the notion of extensive communication that may not quite

translate to outsiders. Underneath all this squabbling is the sense of a domestic partnership ("He drove up his and the cat's dirt driveway") that's long privately understood, even if public acknowledgment was awhile in coming.

Fortunately, the visuals are well worthy of the text, with Root's watercolor and gouache pictures evincing the same effective naturalness as the prose. The cat is wisely underplayed (making the sudden opening of her eyes after the old man's solitary departure a noticeable response), so she doesn't overbalance the bewhiskered old man. The setting is far from elegant but it's full of unforced and restrained character, from the recycled bathroom appliances (an old bathtub next to the porch houses a few struggling plants, and a toilet inviting "junk mail" crouches next to the mailbox) to the water boom in the field behind the house to the single pinwheel that stands bravely in the front yard. The palette leans on warm ochres (nicely setting off the orange cat) until the cat's departure, whereupon blues shadow the landscape and grays thin it, but the soft moonlight shines through the bedroom's tidy yellow curtains and warms up the little house's interior upon her return. The quietly artistic layout (brown rather than black print boxed in restrained sage, full-page illustrations balanced with spot art and text on the facing page) adds a nicely rubbed glow that makes this a comfortably attractive book indeed.

There are certainly plenty of youngsters who will be drawn to the notion of living with just a beloved pet for company. There are also likely quite a few kids in similar human relationships, where they're grumped at by somebody undemonstrative who's genuinely fond of them nonetheless, and this story may help explain that cranky commentary can hide unspoken affection. Even kids who don't fall into those categories will appreciate the rhythmic storytelling, the lively individuality, and the irascible yet endearing relationship between these memorable characters. (Imprint information appears on p. 399.)

Deborah Stevenson, Editor



NEW BOOKS FOR CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE

ADA, ALMA FLOR, comp. ¡Pío Peep!: *Traditional Spanish Nursery Rhymes*; comp. by Alma Flor Ada and F. Isabel Campoy; ad. by Alice Schertle; illus. by Viví Escrivá. HarperCollins, 2003 [64p]

Library ed. ISBN 0-688-16020-4 \$16.89

Trade ed. ISBN 0-688-16019-0 \$14.99

Reviewed from galleys

R 2-5 yrs

Co-editors Ada (author of *Where the Flame Trees Bloom*, BCCB 2/95, and *My Name Is María Isabel*, 6/93, etc.) and Campoy present twenty-nine traditional nursery rhymes from Spain and Latin America in Spanish and English. A note explains that the rhymes were selected from numerous Latino anthologies: "Finally, faced with the decision to select among hundreds, we chose those nursery rhymes and songs that we cherished in our own childhoods, and those the numerous children—Mexican, Puerto Rican, Cuban, Dominican, and Central American—with whom we have worked love the most." Each page or spread offers one rhyme, Spanish-language version first. The verses are unforced and bouncy, with

lilting rhythms that make them easy, pleasurable readalouds in both languages. Schertle's English adaptations (based on translations by Ada) of the Spanish rhymes, while not always literal, capture the buoyancy and playfulness of the originals. The art is sometimes a bit bland, but the cozy illustrations have a comforting familiarity. The organic palette uses varying tones of green and blue, yellow and red to differentiate between interior and exterior, daytime and nighttime; some pages have simple textile-like borders in carnival colors that enclose the action. Images are sunny pastorals or domestic scenes featuring happy children, pleasant adults, and winning fauna—even the sun and the moon, peeking over the horizon in different spreads, smile indulgently. This is a substantive, useful collection that will enrich nursery rhyme, readaloud, and bilingual shelves. JMD

AHLBERG, ALLAN *The Cat Who Got Carried Away*; illus. by Katherine McEwen. Candlewick, 2003 80p
ISBN 0-7636-2073-4 \$15.99 R* Gr. 2-4

The third adventure of the Gaskitt family is a marvelous montage of all things comic—mysteries small and large, slapstick, parody, sports, unusual food cravings, pets with delusions of grandeur, an exciting chase scene, “honest” villains, police dogs, a new baby, a very clever rat, penguins, and even some very useful maps. It all starts out innocently enough, with the Gaskitts relaxing and looking at family photos, but immediately things get interesting when Horace, the family cat, notices a man pushing a barking baby carriage. When pets all over town begin disappearing (including Horace), it's clear that something is amiss, but the children are too busy running, running, and running some more at the behest of their P.E.-inclined substitute teacher (their real teacher, Mrs. Fritter, has fallen out of a window trying to find the class pet. “Poor Randolph!” [the children] cried. “Poor Randolph!” “Poor Randolph!” Oh, yes, and poor Mrs. Fritter”) to be able to do any sleuthing. Ahlberg's characteristically droll narration provides for many laugh-out-loud moments as the mystery unfolds. McEwen's watercolor and crayon illustrations are themselves witty compositions that help the reader visualize the crimes and the clues. Written as an early chapter book, this breathless romp is impossible to put down until the mysteries are solved and all five Gaskitts (make that six—Horace is a Gaskitt, too) are safely at home waiting, with the rest of us, for their next adventure. KC

ALLEN, WILL *Swords for Hire: Two of the Most Unlikely Heroes You'll Ever Meet*; illus. by David Michael Beck. CenterPunch, 2003 [168p]
Paper ed. ISBN 0-9724882-0-0 \$6.95
Reviewed from galleys Ad Gr. 5-8

Sixteen-year-old Sam Hatcher is sent off to join the King's Royal Guard, which has fallen on hard times since the (presumed) death of King Olive and the ascension to the throne of Olive's smarmy brother, Boonder; the captain of the Royal Guard then sends Sam to Rigby Skeet, “Sword For Hire,” for a little seasoning. The seasoning begins almost at once when a man stumbles into Skeet's ramshackle shack with three arrows in his back and a message: King Olive is still alive, imprisoned in the evil Boneman's palace. Set up by the King's Elite, the false King Boonder's new goon patrol, Skeet and Hatcher barely escape with their lives; undeterred, they set out to rescue the true king. Allen's tale is eminently predictable, the tone is a bit sophomoric, and the plotting is, occasionally, sloppy. This novel

is also, however, a breezy, lighthearted spoof of adventure fantasy plots, with a silly sense of humor ("Later, they had to cross the River of Blood, slosh through the Swamp of Anguish, and walk through the Pasture of Randolph. 'Pasture of Randolph?' Sam had asked. 'I guess Randolph owns it,' Rigby replied") and a quirky sense of order ("The fist, that's what's real! The right to the jaw, the sword to the gut! Not that magical junk!"). The attention-grabbing opening (the imprisoned King Olive's story thus far) launches readers into a swift-moving plot parade that doesn't let up until the foregone but still funny conclusion. Readers seeking the painless guffaw, or even the almost-silent-snort, will find it here. JMD

ARRINGTON, AILEEN *Camp of the Angel*. Philomel, 2003 [160p]

ISBN 0-399-23882-4 \$16.99

Reviewed from galleys

R Gr. 4-7

After the departure of their mother four years ago, Jordan and her little brother (Carson, known as Brother) were left on their own with their shiftless and abusive father. Now eleven, Jordan misses her mother (whose departure she attributes to "nerves," though it's clear serious mental problems were the cause) but rarely questions her strictured island existence and joyless home. Things begin to change, however, with the children's discovery of a stray white cat, whom they begin to feed and cherish; when her father's behavior becomes increasingly dangerous (and illegal), it's his mistreatment of her beloved cat that finally motivates Jordan to take the necessary steps to stop him. The prose moves somewhat slowly, the descriptive turns sometimes offering more artistic than emotional rewards, but Arrington's understated style assures that the story doesn't bog down in atmosphere. The plainspoken text straightforwardly and effectively depicts Jordan's relationship with her stormy father ("It was the wrong tone. It was important not to use the wrong tone with Papa") and the sad realities of assistance ("Jordan remembered that they said it was the law about reporting it. And it was the law about visiting within twenty-four hours and then they went away and *you* stayed"), and the cat makes an effective device both for the plot and for Jordan's protective projection. Though somewhat rawer, this will likely please those who enjoyed Giff's *Pictures of Hollis Woods* (BCCB 12/02) and who'd like to see another hard-luck child find the place she deserves. DS

ASHMAN, LINDA *Babies on the Go*; illus. by Jane Dyer. Harcourt, 2003 32p

ISBN 0-15-201894-8 \$16.00

R 2-4 yrs

Ashman, author of *Castles, Caves, and Honeycombs* (BCCB 5/01) looks here to animal motion, specifically animal babies in motion. The book begins at the beginning: "Some babies stand up right away.// They take a step, then run and play.// But many need more time to grow,// so they have *other* ways to go." This brief introduction is followed by a rhyming list of ways various babies travel: human babies "rolling by in baby strollers," koala babies "holding tight to Mother's shoulders"; sloth babies "swinging in a belly sling," swan babies "sailing snug beneath a wing," etc. While Ashman's rhyme is rather singsong and occasionally technically stretched, toddlers will appreciate the gentle rhythm and quiet tenderness. Dyer's meticulously realistic yet fluid watercolors of these parent-child pairs have a likable gentleness. A final page features thumbnails of the larger illustrations with captions identifying the animals. The text's involving momentum makes this title an effective readaloud choice, especially if the storytime theme (or class-

room unit) revolves around non-domestic animals; preschoolers investigating their own means of motion will be intrigued by the animal world's possibilities. JMD

AUCH, MARY JANE *Souperchicken*; written and illus. by Mary Jane Auch and Herm Auch. Holiday House, 2003 32p
ISBN 0-8234-1704-2 \$16.95 Ad 5-8 yrs

Henrietta is a discriminating chicken who loves to read, so much so that she neglects her egg-laying duties on the farm, to the dismay of her aunts Golda and Zoe. Since "Henrietta wasn't the only hen not laying well," the farmer responds to the drop in egg production by sending the older hens "on vacation" while keeping the young Henrietta, who owes him more eggs. The excluded Henrietta is crestfallen until she reads the writing on the side of the truck taking the old hens on vacation—"Souper Soup Co."—and realizes the aunts are headed for a soupy doom. On the way to rescue her aunts, Henrietta saves a truck full of pigs headed to the Saucy Sausage Company and a truck full of cows bound for the Happy Hamburger Company, reiterating as she does so, "Please learn to read! Reading can save your lives!" Eventually (very eventually) Henrietta rescues the aunts, after which she finds them all (chickens, pigs, cows) a home with a vegetarian farmer who keeps cows for milk, pigs for digging truffles, and hens for eggs. "And Henrietta took on an important new career. She became a reading teacher." The joke here is a good one, but the text is overly long, and the constant reiteration of the reading-is-good-for-you theme eventually becomes tiresome. The illustrations help lift the title out of its text-intensive mire, however, since Auch and Auch's computer-enhanced, animatronic art (according to Mary Jane Auch's website, the medium is oil paint and digital technology) is slick and shiny, adding a manic energy to events. Despite the dogmatic message, the clever wordplay (the book Henrietta is reading when the story opens is *Could the Sky Fall?* by Chick N. Little) and lively action will entertain informed listeners as well as newly independent readers. JMD

BATES, KATHARINE LEE *America the Beautiful*; illus. by Wendell Minor. Putnam, 2003 48p
ISBN 0-399-23885-9 \$16.99 M 6-10 yrs

Minor supplies watercolor and gouache scenes to accompany all four verses of the Bates poem that has become, since its 1895 publication, an unofficial national anthem. Minor's vision tends toward pastoral and wilderness landscape, with the inclusion of an industrious farmer harvesting his Iowa grain, and canoers paddling their way through the Florida Everglades. His literal interpretations are generally predictable, if apt: there's plenty of purple in those mountains towering "above the fruited plain," and a weathervane angel blasts its trumpet to herald the grace "God shed" over an autumnal Vermont town. Several pictures, though, are simply pretty scenes that bear no specific relation to an excerpt or seem to miss the point entirely. Those beautiful pilgrim feet, of "stern, impassioned stress" fame, stand stock still, while on the next spread a covered wagon beats their "thoroughfare for freedom" across Nebraska. A farmer tucking sheaves of wheat beneath his arm in rolling fields of nonstop gold seems an improbable symbol of any national flaw in need of mending, or any soul to be confirmed "in self-control." Addenda include useful information about Bates and her original poem, information about Samuel Ward (who crafted the melody to which it would eventually be sung), a reproduction of the song scored as a hymn, annotated thumbnail sketches of all illustrations, and a numbered U.S. map that displays sites stretching from sea to

white-space sea. Flip through the pictures, and then encourage kids to discuss where they believe America's beauty lies. EB

BELL, HILARI *The Goblin Wood*. EOS/HarperCollins, 2003 294p

Library ed. ISBN 0-06-051372-1 \$17.89

Trade ed. ISBN 0-06-051371-3 \$16.99

R Gr. 6-9

Makenna is eleven years old when her mother, a hedgewitch, is drowned in the village pond as a result of the Decree of Bright Magic passed by the religious (and sorcerous) Hierarch. In revenge for her mother's death, the girl floods the fields and houses of her former neighbors, after which she flees deep into the woods; there she encounters the goblins who are being driven from their homes by the decree. Five years later, Makenna is the general of an army of goblins that besieges settlers from the Hierarch, driving them from the wood. Concurrently, in the City of Steps, a mistakenly dishonored knight named Tobin is determined to clear himself. To that end he undertakes a task for Master Lazur, a leading Hierarch priest, intending to seek out and destroy the sorceress who bespells and enslaves the goblins harassing the settlers. Hedgewitch and knight race toward collision in Bell's intricate fantasy. The goblins capture Tobin, and his imprisonment causes him to rethink all he has taken as truth. His prejudices against both girl and goblins fade when he is the recipient of their gruff kindness and witness to their loyalty and camaraderie. The roaring action here is supported by strong characterizations grounded in understandable (if not always laudable) motivations. Well-rounded main characters fight a morally complex villain over ethical issues of unusual nuance for this type of fast-paced adventure fantasy. The goblin characters are neatly rendered, and the contrast between their size and their heroism makes them truly memorable. The low-key potential romance between Tobin and Makenna in no way undercuts the tension or pace, and the final outcome is in question until the bittersweet conclusion. Readers who enjoy being swept up in intelligent action will leap right in. JMD

BELTON, SANDRA *Pictures for Miss Josie*; illus. by Benny Andrews. Greenwillow, 2003 40p

Library ed. ISBN 0-688-17481-7 \$17.89

Trade ed. ISBN 0-688-17480-9 \$16.99

R 6-9 yrs

A young African-American boy traveling with his father meets Miss Josie, the woman who supported the father's education and shaped his future. The boy is intimidated by the forceful woman ("She was like a giant, standing there in front of the sun. Against the row of houses without yards in between. He wondered if she was the one who had pushed all the houses together"), but she puts him at ease with an appreciation of his desire to "make pictures." Years later, the boy attends college in Miss Josie's city; when he goes to see her ("To get the visit over with. And make his father happy"), he finds that her house is "a home away from home. Just the way his dad had said." Miss Josie encourages the young man in his passion to make art, celebrates his graduation, rejoices in his marriage, and lives to meet his own young son. The poetic language is rich and thoughtful, and the stately pace offers homage to an African-American woman of singular character. Andrews' (illustrator of Fraustino's *The Hickory Chair*, BCCB 3/01) collage and oil paint pictures are an arresting combination of realistic and interpreted images that reflect and expand upon the story. Contrasting dimensions rule in alternately spare

and complex compositions: the elongated Miss Josie is the dominant figure in the early pages, the boy tiny in comparison; in later pages Miss Josie is the smaller figure, and the boy, now grown to a young man, towers over the elderly woman. Flowers, featured in many of the spreads, are riotous bursts of color and form that refuse to be repressed despite containment in clay jars or on manicured lawns. A concluding note explains that the story was "written to honor the memory of Josephine Carroll Smith," an educator in Washington, D.C., who "opened her home, her heart, and her purse to numerous young black men who were struggling to educate themselves. They became her sons." JMD

BOTTNER, BARBARA *The Scaredy Cats*; illus. by Victoria Chess. Simon, 2003 32p

ISBN 0-689-83786-0 \$14.95

Ad 5-8 yrs

The Scaredy Cats are well named: they're afraid to close the window (it might fall on Mrs. S. C.'s fingers), so they shiver instead; they're afraid to cook breakfast (the pan might burn somebody) so they go hungry; they're afraid to bounce Baby Scaredy Cat in the air (she might go up and never come down), so they're bored, and so on. At the end of the day, Baby Scaredy Cat points out that avoiding things out of fear made their lives nearly unbearable, so that it might be equally wise to expect *good* things to happen. This is basically a twist on noodlehead tales such as *The Stupids Step Out*, and there's some of the same appeal in the silly behavior, in the refrain ("All kinds of things can happen"), and in the cumulative list of the discomforts their fear makes them endure. This doesn't have the same nonsensical logic, though, since the fears are somewhat random, and audiences will be quick to ask why Baby Scaredy Cat waited until today to question what's clearly a long-standing policy; nor are the fearful ideas expressed with enough humor to make them funny in their own right. Chess is an interesting illustrator for this project, since her worlds often suggest a good reason for considerable fear, but there's a squat and solid domesticity to her furry protagonists that comically underscores their limitations. Their homey tackiness suits the densely crowded patterns and overstuffed decor of their feline residence, wherein claustrophobia would be the most logical worry of all. This is still an amusing sequence, and kids will particularly enjoy the parental foolishness tempered by the wisdom of the youngster. DS

BROOKS, KEVIN *Lucas: A Story of Love and Hate*. Chicken House/Scholastic, 2003 423p

ISBN 0-439-45698-3 \$16.95

Ad Gr. 7-12

In this British import, fifteen-year-old Cait finds her peaceful life with her father disrupted when her restless older brother, Dominic, comes back from university for the summer. Dominic is drawn to the troublemaking element in their small island community, rich Jamie Tait and his hangers-on, not knowing that Jamie has made it clear he has designs on Cait despite her obvious rejection of him. Into this tense situation comes Lucas, a boy unlike anyone Cait's ever known; living rough on the coast, he's despised as a gypsy by the bigoted locals, but Cait is drawn to his unusual serenity and his perceptiveness. His strangeness makes him an easy target, however, for Jamie Tait's cunning hate campaign that threatens Lucas' freedom and, when mob frenzy has been incited, his life. There are some appealing elements here—the magnetic, possibly supernatural outsider, the changes in Cait's relationship with her naïve older brother, the shady power structures of the insular

community—and Brooks is particularly good at using the physical reality of the semi-isolated island and its natural features to enhance the mood of his story. Unfortunately, this lacks the tautness that marked his previous book, *Martyn Pig* (BCCB 9/02), with Cair's lengthy self-examinations and explanations diffusing the tension rather than enhancing it. The heavy hand of contrivance is too evident in the events and in the characters, both the good guys (Lucas seems born for martyrdom) and the antagonists (their villainy is too pat to be interesting). The mixture of mob sway and supernatural elements is employed more effectively in Westall's *Yaxley's Cat* (BCCB 3/92), but this will definitely have allure for readers partial to tales of romantic and misunderstood strangers. DS

CAPUZZO, MICHAEL *Close to Shore: The Terrifying Shark Attacks of 1916*. Crown, 2003 [144p] illus. with photographs

Library ed. ISBN 0-375-92231-8 \$18.99

Trade ed. ISBN 0-375-82231-3 \$16.95

Reviewed from galleys

R* Gr. 6-10

Why should adults have all the fun? Capuzzo pares down his adult study of the early twentieth century New Jersey shark attacks for what is certain to be an appreciative middle-school audience. While trimming chapters on biographical background of the victims and much of the discussion about the shark's menace to the hotel trade, he retains his edge-of-the-seat narrative style, in which chapters concerning attacks on and response from the human community alternate with reconstruction (empathetic, but short of anthropomorphized) of the fish's probable motivation and predatory path. Capuzzo delivers all the terror promised in his subtitle, but he also explores seriously the social mores and scientific misunderstanding that heightened both the likelihood of attacks and delay in evacuation. This account is based on a popular theory that the 1916 attacks were committed by a single predator, but Capuzzo also acknowledges the controversy surrounding this view and admits our current grasp of shark behavior cannot settle the question. A list of sources is included, as are period photographs and generous excerpts from contemporary newspapers. Readers can expect to spend the summer bolted to their beach blankets or watching *Jaws* reruns from the safety of an armchair. EB

COLLINS, MARY *Airborne: A Photobiography of Wilbur and Orville Wright*. National Geographic, 2003 64p illus. with photographs

ISBN 0-7922-6957-8 \$18.95

R Gr. 5-8

Collins ably condenses the Wright Brothers' aeronautical accomplishments into a picture-packed title that should pump attentive middle-schoolers up to speed on the technical challenges overcome and the unique fraternal relationship that poised Orville and Wilbur for success. While biography readers soak up the details of the brothers' work strategies ("Orville . . . loved to bang away on his latest idea. . . . Wilbur loved to mull over big ideas"), history buffs can savor period flavor (female passengers tied down their skirts to protect against "moral hazards") and technophiles revel in photographs of wind tunnels, engines, and catapults. The requisite physics of pitch, roll, yaw, and lift are clearly explained in text and accompanying diagrams, and even readers with limited scientific interest should readily grasp their importance in early aeronautic design. At a brief but thorough sixty pages, this title should fill the bill for most report writers, but enthusiasts in search of

more depth (or, perhaps, altitude?) should taxi on over to Russell Freedman's acclaimed *The Wright Brothers: How They Invented the Airplane* (BCCB 6/91). Index, chronology, and list of resources are appended. EB

CROWE, CHRIS *Getting Away with Murder: The True Story of the Emmett Till Case*. Fogelman, 2003 128p illus. with photographs
ISBN 0-8037-2804-2 \$18.99 Ad Gr. 6-12

Having dealt with the Emmett Till trial in fictional form (*Mississippi Trial, 1955*, BCCB 4/02), Crowe now provides a nonfiction exploration of the infamous 1955 case, wherein a fourteen-year-old African-American boy was murdered in Mississippi for the attention he paid to a white woman. As well as covering the main aspects of the high-profile trial that controversially exonerated the defendants, the author provides additional information and insights that help flesh out the picture. The brief biography of Emmett himself, for instance, brings him into personal focus and helps put his peer-encouraged daring into context, and the book makes clear that Emmett Till's mother, with her insistence on bringing her son's body home to Chicago and making the crime public, played a large role in the events. There's also some quiet acknowledgment of the striations in white Mississippi society and the possibility that outside scrutiny, intended to make acquittal difficult, actually increased its likelihood. The exploration is marred by heavy-handed and dogmatic tendencies in the prose and the scattered organization, not to mention the absence of notes in the otherwise generous end matter. Nonetheless, this is a thoughtful exploration of an incident that many young people will know only as a footnote, if they know it at all, despite its importance in galvanizing the civil rights movement. Black-and-white photographs (including the famous *Jet* magazine image of Emmett's battered body) appear throughout; a timeline, bibliography, and list of further resources (but no index or notes) are appended. DS

DERBY, SALLY *Two Fools and a Horse: An Original Tale*; illus. by Robert Rayevsky. Cavendish, 2003 32p
ISBN 0-7614-5119-6 \$16.95 R 6-9 yrs

When a sinister-looking peddler appears on the streets of their tiny village, Janski and Wilhelm, two lazy fellows, decide to follow the peddler, convinced he has stolen goods in his big blue pack. They puzzle over what the peddler could have stolen, until Wilhelm has a brain wave: "Farmer Kohl has been missing a horse for three days now." Undeterred by the fact that the peddler's sack is far too small to hold a horse, the two simpletons take action: while Janski keeps an eye on the peddler, Wilhelm fetches Farmer Kohl, the magistrate, and "a dozen or so farmers, armed with hoes and pitchforks." The men react to Janski and Wilhelm's story with hoots of derision ("You couldn't get a horse in a bundle that size"), while the peddler helpfully opens his pack and begins to sort through his wares, showing pots and pans, a silver-plated accordion, a cuckoo clock, etc. After the farmers have all bought something and left, "the peddler pulled wide the neck of his bundle. 'Ho! Come, my beauty,' he called with a whistle. There was a rustle and a stir, and out of the bundle clambered a large brown horse, tossing its mane and stamping the ground." The sly, ironic text of this combination fool and trickster tale has both pace and humor, and the style echoes the best of traditional folktales. Rayevsky's mixed-media illustrations are as clever as the text, and his controlled, sophisticated technique adds a subtle depth to the visuals; his masterful drafting

makes the deceptively simple compositions emphatic and strong. Young audiences will appreciate the trickery and ponder the mystery behind it. JMD

DEUKER, CARL *High Heat*. Houghton, 2003 277p
ISBN 0-618-31117-3 \$16.00

R Gr. 7-10

Shane Hunter's on a fast track downward after his father, accused of money laundering, succumbs to despair during the investigation and takes his own life. With their assets seized, the family is forced from their elegant home into public housing, and Shane slides from the posh Shorelake Academy into public school. Most devastating is his loss of interest in baseball, but after a brush with the law, the talented pitcher is required by his probation officer to sign up for the school team. Shane's talent as a "closer" propels his team to success and the rest should be a baseball fairy tale, except for the fact that Shane's still got of load of anger to confront, and he takes his hostility out on Shorelake's best hitter, Reese Robertson, seriously injuring him with a fastball to the head. Following the "accident," Shane hits a slump and, after obsessing over Reese's recovery, he determines to help the hitter regain his confidence. Reese, however, is now permanently reduced to a "charity case; the scrub who tries so hard everybody roots for him." Their practice sessions get Shane back to the top of his game, but Reese's career is gone for good. *High Heat* joins the Deuker canon (*Painting the Black*, BCCB 6/97, etc.) with yet another fine study of a conflicted soul whose ethical salvation is determined in a sporting arena, and once more readers are left to ponder whether a tainted success loses its sweet savor. EB

DOWELL, FRANCES O'ROARK *Where I'd Like to Be*. Atheneum, 2003 [240p]
ISBN 0-689-84420-4 \$15.95

Reviewed from galleys

R Gr. 5-7

After a life staying with various caretakers of various levels of competence, eleven-year-old Maddie has been at the East Tennessee Children's Home for five months when her life is changed by the arrival of a new girl. Murphy has glamour and charisma, much of it due to her exotic life with her parents before they died, and she's fascinated with Maddie's scrapbooks, especially her scrapbook of houses. It's Murphy's idea to build a fort, and she involves not only Maddie but also Donita and Ricky Ray, two other Home residents, and Logan, a geeky classmate, in its creation. The fort then becomes the center of their lives, a place where they find comradeship and where they add to the scrapbooks that have become reflections of all their dreams—until Murphy tries to curry favor with a popular girl by showing her a scrapbook, which then gets ridiculed and destroyed. Dowell gives Maddie's narration a forthright matter-of-factness that keeps the story from tipping into the sentimental despite the emotional subject matter (seeing Donita with the adult mentor Maddie lacks, Maddie says, "A feeling came over me that was both sad and pretty. I couldn't exactly name what it was") and that makes the book accessible to advanced younger readers as well. Some readers will realize well before Maddie does that Murphy's autobiography is pure fiction, but they'll also see, as Maddie and her friends do, what that fiction means and how important it is. The inclusion of Logan, who has his own family issues despite having two whole parents, ensures that this resonates as more than just a drama of legally abandoned kids; it's a story that understands that many young people have to define their own worth without the help of a family. DS

DYSON, MARIANNE J. *Home on the Moon: Living on a Space Frontier*. National Geographic, 2003 64p illus. with photographs
ISBN 0-7922-7193-9 \$18.95 Ad Gr. 4-6

Former NASA Mission Control staffer Dyson considers the history and morphology of the moon and speculates on its possible commercial development, resource exploitation, and chances for settlement. The delicate relationships between the moon's geologic composition, its balance of day- and nightspan, its gravitational field, and the extant technologies available for lunar development are ably introduced, and cost effectiveness for various undertakings are examined; ample photographs, imaginative paintings, and supportive diagrams enhance textual discussion. The recent space-shuttle crash, which seems to have put even relatively modest extraterrestrial pursuits on hold, undermines the claim "Space exploration is not as dangerous as it used to be" and unintentionally reminds readers that making the moon into an economic satellite is now further in the future than it was when this title went to print. Moreover, Dyson posits her predictions while cavalierly dismissing political considerations: "Current international law forbids governments from owning and selling lunar land. But that could change. One traditional way to own land is to be the first to live on it. . . . Owners then may resell the property for a profit like they do on Earth." While this title probably will not fire up wildly glamorous imaginings, it should provide an informed reality check for budding capitalists and empire builders with their eyes on fresh frontiers. A glossary, bibliographies, and an index are included. EB

EASTON, PATRICIA HARRISON *Davey's Blue-Eyed Frog*; illus. by Mike Wohnoutka. Clarion, 2003 92p
ISBN 0-618-18185-7 \$14.00 M Gr. 3-5

Third-grader Davey is tadpole hunting at a local pond with his friend Becky when he runs across a talking frog. The frog is an enchanted princess, no less, who demands, "Stop staring and give me a kiss." Davey is more interested in showing off a talking frog to his classmates than he is in restoring Princess Amelia to her human form, so rather than kiss her he drops her into his tackle box and takes her home. Amelia isn't shy about her demands: she wants food and a comfy place to sit, and she wants to be kissed so the spell (cast by a wizard in the pay of her wicked, throne-stealing uncle) will be broken and she can go home. Davey must weigh his burning desire to show off against his distaste for kissing a frog, but he ultimately does the right thing. The book unfortunately largely squanders the humorous premise: the dialogue is stilted, characterizations are minimal, and the contrived plot has a clumsy dénouement. Davey discovers that he should take better care of his pets (he releases some sadly neglected salamanders and a turtle) and Amelia gets to go home, but how she got to the pond in the first place, how she gets back, and where she goes back to are never satisfactorily explained. Black-and-white drawings make the characters look more adult than juvenile, and the frog is just too comically cartoony to elicit much sympathy. The slightly oversized trim size, large font, and wide-leaded text blocks may attract reluctant readers to this easy chapter book, but fans of fractured fairy tales will be better off with Scieszka's *The Stinky Cheese Man and Other Fairly Stupid Tales* (BCCB 10/92) or Napoli's *The Prince of the Pond* (12/92). JMD

EMBERLEY, ED *Thanks, Mom*; written and illus. by Ed Emberley. Little, 2003 32p

ISBN 0-316-24022-2 \$15.95

R 2-4 yrs

Kiko, the circus mouse, ought to know better than to make off with a piece of cheese (sitting minding its own business on a plate that says "The Delicious Cheese Company"), but does he? No, indeedy. Kiko snatches up that cheese and hightails it for home, but he runs into Gato (the cat), who gives chase. It's looking bleak for Kiko, but then Fido (the dog) starts chasing Gato, and then Otto (the tiger) chases Fido, and then Mumbo (the elephant) chases Otto, and it looks like there is no escape for Kiko—until his mother, Koko, gets into Mumbo's face and has a few words with her. Elephant, tiger, dog, and cat flee the wrath of the protective mama mouse, and Koko and Kiko go home with the cheese. With its repeated phrases (which consist essentially of variants on the early lines, "Oh, Kiko, see Gato? Uh-oh! See Gato run? Run, Kiko, run! *But don't drop that delicious cheese!*"), Emberley's text is a masterful piece of narrative engineering; the flashy graphics combine with the speedy text in a chase-and-escape sequence that will warm the heart of any toddler thrill-seeker. Ringmaster Emberley visually introduces his cast at the beginning, employing a double-page spread to reveal their talents: Otto the Outrageous gets shot out of cannons; Koko plays the saxophone while Kiko the Courageous rides the high wire; Mumbo the Marvelous balances peanuts on her nose; Fido the Fabulous is a trapeze artist; and Gato the Glorious is a juggler. With that introduction for context, listeners will appreciate the clown-like aspects of the chase that follows, especially the concluding spread on which Kiko thanks his mother, who replies (in a way that only indulgent mamas can), "You are very welcome, my little sweetheart darling." Use this in a circus storytime, and get ready for a three-ring reaction. JMD

ESCKILSEN, ERIK E. *The Last Mall Rat*. Lorraine/Houghton, 2003 182p

ISBN 0-618-23417-9 \$15.00

Ad Gr. 6-9

Short on cash but long on creativity, fifteen-year-old Mitch Grant markets himself to beleaguered mall salespersons as a unique "customer service" specialist, a hound of vengeance who tails troublesome customers out to their cars and terrifies them by shouting "Caveat emptor!" until they flee. Business is so brisk that Mitch enlists the aid of several friends, who all don Hello Kitty masks when they launch their raids. Jimmy Biggins, however, is the loose cannon in Mitch's set, and when he physically attacks a customer in the parking lot, it's clear the game has spun out of control; Mitch must then decide whether he'll blow the whistle on Jimmy and, necessarily, implicate himself and other friends in the process. Readers will recognize more than a grain of truth in Eskilsen's depiction of mall culture, from the security guards who profile teens to shoppers who demand clerks' undivided attention but have no real intention of buying. Where readers are likely to balk, though, is at Mitch's (and, for that matter Eskilsen's) laundry list of implausible excuses for his misbegotten project, which includes everything from the downfall of the central business district to child-labor laws to Jimmy's dismal home life—everything except the kids' own responsibility for an obviously terrible idea. Moreover, it's pretty obvious that even the Keystone Kops should have rounded up this little gang long before there was any call for confession. Still, there's an alluring urban-legend quality to the theme, and kids can add this to their own stock of local mall lore. EB

FARISH, TERRY *The Cat Who Liked Potato Soup*; illus. by Barry Root. Candlewick, 2003 [32p]

ISBN 0-7636-0834-3 \$15.99

Reviewed from galleys

R* 5-8 yrs

See this month's Big Picture, p. 387, for review.

FLEISCHMAN, SID *Disappearing Act*. Greenwillow, 2003 133p

Library ed. ISBN 0-06-051963-0 \$16.89

Trade ed. ISBN 0-06-051962-2 \$15.99

Ad Gr. 5-7

Veteran writer Sid Fleischman himself puts a finger on the strongest and weakest elements of this comedic adventure: the strongest, in having a character describe the twelve-year-old narrator as endowed with a "bouncy gift with words"; and the weakest, in admitting in an author's note to being unable to "figure out a dramatic scene to wrap things up—until the very last instant. Suddenly there it was. Like a jack-in-the-box." Yes, and yes again. The voice of narrator Kevin is fresh and full of surprises as he and his twenty-one-year-old opera-singing sister, Holly, flee from New Mexico to California to dodge a stalker (whom they nickname "The Toad") after discovering that their mother has disappeared on an archeological dig in Mexico. Apt and funny observations abound: Holly's voice coach looks "like a sumo wrestler in a feathered hat" and wears "earrings that swung around like wrecking balls when she turned her head"; as the pace hurtles toward climax, Kevin discovers that "the string section had two dentists and a psychiatrist in it. I was glad to know that if Holly got a toothache or went crazy on stage, help was right there in the orchestra pit." Also enjoyable are the references to children's books about other scary journeys, such as *The Wolves of Willoughby Chase*, *Smith*, *The Lord of the Rings*, and, most strategic to the plot, *Where the Wild Things Are* (R. L. Stine gets thrown in as a side joke). Less satisfying is the coincidence of Holly's discovering a significant plot point from an out-of-town newspaper she just happens to pick up ("and wouldn't you know it"). The wrap-up too seems contrived and abrupt, as a cast who has engaged us suddenly disbands—or maybe the childhood book that Kevin never finds, the one with the secret map their mother left them, presages a sequel? BH

FOREMAN, MICHAEL *Wonder Goal!*; written and illus. by Michael Foreman. Farrar, 2003 26p

ISBN 0-374-38500-9 \$16.00

Ad 5-8 yrs

It's the new kid's first soccer match and he's out to prove himself to his teammates, guys who share the "same impossible dream of one day becoming world class soccer stars." And he does it—kicks a "screamer" right beyond the outstretched fingers of the goalie. Now freeze that frame. Segue from brilliant green field to restful blue bedroom where the boy sleeps surrounded by posters of his soccer heroes; then flash to the slightly duller bedroom where his dad used to sleep, surrounded by posters of his soccer heroes ("His dad was not going to see the wonder goal. It wouldn't be in the papers and it wouldn't be on the telly. His dad was going to miss it"). Fast forward to a different goalie, an adult who misses the ball driven just beyond the goalie's outstretched fingers. It's the World Cup, and the boy is now a pro who's kicked another bomb, "Just like the goal he had scored all those years before on that freezing boyhood Sunday." Still with us? It's questionable whether young viewers are, as Foreman toggles between fields and bedrooms,

past and present, wish and memory, all shadowed by a cloud of mild anxiety about whether the player's father is among the spectators. The timelessness of soccer mania is undoubtedly the focus here, but the jumbled images and underdeveloped themes of rookie player and inspirational parent will leave many listeners scratching their heads. Still, kids who can brush aside the plot for the uncomplicated pleasures of fast moves, rough tumbles, and thunderous applause should be well satisfied with Foreman's vivid watercolor portrayal and dream themselves onto the team. EB

FRANCO, BETSY *Mathemattickles!*; illus. by Steven Salerno. McElderry, 2003 34p

ISBN 0-689-84357-7 \$17.95

Ad Gr. 3-5

"Mathemattickles" are poems using mathematical formats and symbols as integral aspects of their verse, here arrayed seasonally starting with autumn ("holes + nuts - nuts = squirrel hide & seek") and going through the year to summer ("lightningbugs x jar = summer lantern"). Multiplication, division, fractions, even graphs get in on the act, with up to five verse "problems" per spread. Some of the math is fairly arbitrarily applied (there's little conceptual difference between some of the multiplication problems and the addition sums), and there's a fair bit of cheating here and there (what looks like math is sometimes just concrete poetry); not all of the aggregations are clever beyond the mathematical component. It's quite an ingenious idea, however, and there are several cunning entries that will capture youthful attention; Franco also has a good sense of season-evoking detail, so the entries genuinely reflect the cyclic changes of the year in a way that young readers will recognize. There's definite flair to the kitschy retro art, which relies on the squiggles, streamlined abstracted figures, and vibrant party colors of 1960s advertising; unfortunately, the art overpowers rather than enhances the quiet atmospherics of the verse and visually buries the brief lines in the energetic, high-impact compositions. Drawbacks notwithstanding, this begs to be used as the center of a classroom assignment, either for straight poetry or for an inspired math crossover. DS

FRANK, E. R. *Friction*. Jackson/Atheneum, 2003 197p

ISBN 0-689-85384-X \$16.95

R Gr. 7-10

Twelve-year-old Alex loves her alternative school, her longtime classmates, and especially her devoted teacher, Simon, and she's looking forward to the class camping trip. New girl Stacy seems at first to be an enhancement, sharing family secrets with Alex and bringing a rakish worldliness to the ensemble, but then she begins to undermine the group's cohesion by suggesting that Simon's interest in Alex goes well beyond the teacherly. Stacy's insinuations are so effective that the class—and even Alex—begins to question and reexamine Simon's behavior, and when Stacy accuses Simon of molesting her, Alex is unable to muster a convincing denial. The book concludes by treating its heroine somewhat unfairly, giving Alex a rather unrealistic amount of power and, therefore, blame; up until then, however, it's an intriguingly nuanced account of a young girl's struggle to understand a complicated situation. Alex's self-examination is both realistic and realistically limited—she's honest enough to be aware that she finds Simon's affectionate touches pleasurable and that her body is beginning to be capable of different kinds of pleasure, but it's still hard for her to assess the meaning of all this physicality. Frank interestingly complicates the question with some innocent but seriously

naïve lapses of judgment on Simon's part, with good-hearted adult orthodoxy that leaves Alex on her own in the face of Stacy's increasingly dangerous insinuations, and with classmates whose own adolescence leaves them piqued by the gossip as well as confused by the situation. Aside from being a thoughtful and compelling read, this would be a terrific book for opening up a provocative discussion about the ethics of teacher-student relations as well as the actions of Alex, Stacy, and Simon. DS

FRAZEE, MARLA *Roller Coaster*; written and illus. by Marla Frazee. Harcourt, 2003 32p

ISBN 0-15-204554-6 \$16.00

R 4-7 yrs

Within the line snaking its way toward the Rocket there stands a skeptical but game little gal who "has never ridden on a roller coaster before, ever." The size and noise is intimidating, but she allows her father to guide her into the front car. Then "WHOOSH! Most people scream. Some people can't make a sound. And one person [guess who?] can't even open her eyes." When the thrill's over, though, and the riders variously sprint and wobble their way down the ramp, she's a full-fledged convert, ready to go again. Of course the little girl is too immersed in her own experience to note the people around her, but nothing escapes Frazee, who pictorially documents the reaction of the other ten riders, from the senior citizens who clearly embrace coasters as a lifelong passion, to the teenagers clutching and smooching in the last seat, to the burly, bulging-muscled twentysomethings who exit scrunching their eyes and grabbing their guts. Yellow cars on red track zoom gracefully across airy white space, and bright red text follows the course of twists and loops and turns until the ride slows to a stop and the font returns to sober black. Here's an enticement to reluctant first timers and a promise of great things to come for kids still too young to pull down the lap bar. EB

GERSTEIN, MORDICAI *Sparrow Jack*; written and illus. by Mordicai Gerstein. Foster/Farrar, 2003 32p

ISBN 0-374-37139-3 \$16.00

Ad Gr. 2-4

In this fact-based picture book, Gerstein tells the story of nineteenth-century Englishman John Bardsley, who grows up a lover of birds, especially the English sparrow. He misses the sparrows when he emigrates to Philadelphia, and when an inchworm infestation devastates the city, he has an idea: bring over 1,000 omnivorous English sparrows to chow down on the pests. The idea is a startling one, but the sparrows settle happily into their new home, curb the inchworm population, and expand their numbers, making Bardsley a happy man. This is a deftly turned story about an interesting historical tidbit, but it's rather alarmingly blinkered about an important fact: Bardsley's action (and a similar importation before his, which the book never mentions) was actually very ecologically destructive, resulting in the spread of an invader species that's displaced and harmed native bird populations; no matter how well-meaning Bardsley may have been and how much short-term use there was in limiting the annoying insects, his bird importation was itself a damaging act. The illustrations are nonetheless zestful and effective: Gerstein gives his compositions a sparrowlike busyness that makes their period scenes lively and entertaining. His scrawling line adds both comedy and atmosphere, while the changing layouts help visually pace the story; both pertly perching birds and squirmy inchworms have an energetic and, appropriately, nearly overwhelming presence,

decorating and breaking the framed borders as well as infiltrating the scenes themselves. Overall, this is an amiable title despite its rather significant flaw; interesting assignments might come of using it in conjunction with material that gives a different view of the sparrows' presence in the U.S. DS

GLICK, SUSAN *One Shot*. Holt, 2003 218p
ISBN 0-8050-6844-9 \$16.95

R Gr. 7-12

Lorrie's expectation of spending her summer lounging by her father's pool before she starts her senior year is set aside when she gets the opportunity to work with the world-famous photographer Molly Price. Her stepmother is helping the aging Molly put her affairs in order, and she asks Lorrie to help sort and catalog a lifetime of papers, photographs, and memories so that they can be archived and made available to future generations. At first intimidated by this gruff and difficult old woman, Lorrie soon begins to cherish their time together, and she gathers her courage to ask Molly to help her with her own photographic aspirations. Lorrie has some talent, but she finds through her disappointingly conventional photographs that she is just as buttoned down as her straitlaced father, preventing failure by managing risk and backing off from emotionally charged or intellectually challenging situations. As her relationship with Molly deepens and she spends more time looking at life through the lens of her camera, Lorrie learns a new economy of academic and affective success, one that measures the worth of an outcome by the amount of difficulty and risk involved. Glick manages the unfolding of Lorrie's emotional and intellectual capabilities without condescension; her transition from conservative introvert to someone who is willing to play just slightly out of her league is believable and engaging, and the ups and downs of Molly's endgame are poignantly real. Readers who aspire to artistic achievement, as well as those dealing with their own aging loved ones, will relate to Lorrie's challenges. KC

GOING, K. L. *Fat Kid Rules the World*. Putnam, 2003 [192p]
ISBN 0-399-23990-1 \$17.99

Reviewed from galleys

R* Gr. 9-12

At six foot one and nearly three hundred pounds, Troy Billings has but one dream—to make an inconspicuous exit from the world. Filthy, emaciated, usually homeless Curt MacCrea finds him contemplating the subway tracks, claims to have saved his life, and demands a free meal. Curt has something to offer, too: a new dream for Troy, in which he's the drummer in Curt's proposed punk band, Rage/Tectonic. Troy knows he's being cajoled, wheedled, and manipulated by Curt at every turn, but an immediate rise in his social status convinces him to stay aboard this train; Curt is indeed a gifted guitarist and a school legend, and any friend of Curt is a force to be reckoned with. Troy has no drumming experience, but he's swept into the current of Curt's determination, and by gad, he actually learns to drum, or at least to provide the powerhouse banging that can drive the real star's screaming riffs and raging lyricism. Troy's contemptuous younger brother begins to offer some respect, and Mr. Billings, an ex-Marine who believes anything can be achieved through will and discipline, surprises Troy by encouraging his efforts and treating Curt with unexpected kindness. Going draws her characters with compassionate acuity; Troy's bumbling advance toward drumming competence and self-respect is funny and heart-wrenching, while Curt's semi-stoned rush at stardom exposes both his brokenness and his promise. Likewise, Going cuts through

the theatrical pretenses of punk rock to capture the angst and artistry. The language is raw, but the relationships are tender, and readers who followed the sadder fortunes of Koertge's *Stoner and Spaz* (BCCB 3/02) will grasp thankfully at the possibility of double salvation. EB

GREENBERG, JAN *Runaway Girl: The Artist Louise Bourgeois*; by Jan Greenberg and Sandra Jordan. Abrams, 2003 80p illus. with photographs
ISBN 0-8109-4237-2 \$19.95 R Gr. 7-12

Greenberg and Jordan, premier art writers for young people (*Vincent Van Gogh*, BCCB 6/01, etc.), turn to the life and work of contemporary sculptor Louise Bourgeois, describing her childhood in France during and after World War I, her move to New York, where she raised a family and continued her sculptural exploration, and her leap into artistic prominence in the 1960s. As usual with living artists, the authors draw not only on published material but also on direct interviews, in this case with the subject and with her longtime assistant, so that Bourgeois' own voice dominates the narrative, enhanced by the additional information and contextual insight provided by the authors. Lavish use of photography, much of it color, helps remind readers of the visual importance of the subject's work, and the juxtaposition of family photographs and biographical discussion with relevant sculptures is particularly rewarding, rather like a thoughtfully produced exhibition. Budding artists will find both the history and the explication of process stimulating, and prospective museum visitors will find the background information enhances their viewing considerably. Meticulous and helpful end matter includes a timeline of important dates, a handy short example of "How to Look at a Sculpture," a list of museums containing Bourgeois' work, a glossary, a bibliography and endnotes, lists of Bourgeois' artwork chronologically and by chapter, and an index. DS

HARRAR, GEORGE *Not as Crazy as I Seem*. Houghton, 2003 [224p]
ISBN 0-618-26365-9 \$15.00
Reviewed from galleys R Gr. 7-10

Fifteen-year-old Devon is obsessed with counting to the number four, avoiding germs, buttoning all the buttons on his shirts (which are arranged in his closet according to color), and engaging in other forms of ritualistic, compulsive behavior that essentially control his life. Devon doesn't see it that way, though; he sees his behavioral eccentricities as the way to keep bad things, uncontrollable things, from happening. His parents are hoping the move to a new town, new school, and new therapist will help Devon get over his problem, but it isn't until his behaviors get him into deep trouble that Devon is motivated to make a serious effort. A strong plot peopled by believable characters makes what could have been another programmatic novel about obsessive-compulsive disorder in teenagers (see Hesser's *Kissing Doorknobs*, BCCB, 9/98) an intriguing character study instead. Minor players are also well developed: Devon's parents are not only complex individuals but a complex couple, with dynamics that would tickle any psychotherapist; Devon's new friend, Tanya, is a quirky, brave young woman who is willing to believe that Devon is more than his behavioral tics; even Ben, the catalyst for Devon's trouble in school, has a backstory that hints at a darker life. (The weakest character is Devon's therapist, Dr. Wasserman, but that may be because, like many effective therapists, he makes Devon do all the work.) The conclusion seems to wrap up

both Devon's school trouble and his OCD with a very neat bow, but the closing line indicates that only extensive efforts will keep Devon from replacing one compulsion with another. It is a tribute to Harrar's strong characterizations that readers will not only believe Devon can do it, they'll be rooting for him. JMD

HARRISON, METTE IVIE *The Monster in Me*. Holiday House, 2003 [176p]
ISBN 0-8234-1713-1 \$16.95

Reviewed from galleys

Ad Gr. 4-7

Thirteen-year-old Natalie is grimly resigned to her foster-care placement with the Parkers, but she'd be far happier back in the group home, where expectations were lower and she was able to slide through life unobserved. She slowly begins to adjust to the Parkers, realizing that they're not the perfect family she had envisioned but instead a family succeeding in the face of their own strains and obstacles, and she slowly dares to connect with the people around her, especially through her love of running, which nets her a place on the cross-country team. The hardest thing of all, though, will be forgiving and starting again with her recovering-addict mother, and Natalie's not sure that she'll be able to—or even wants to—do it. This is fairly programmatic, from Natalie's periodically interpolated monster dreams of convenient symbolism to the nice girl at school with her own dark past to the occasional tendency towards sentimentality ("I really won. And it feels like it was more than just a race"). Underneath the predictability, however, is some solid storytelling about a girl who hasn't had much help finding her place in the world and who therefore isn't entirely sure of what to do when she has a chance at one. The story is, like Natalie's running, well paced, and her joy in her athletic prowess is effectively conveyed; the open-ended conclusion has an honesty missing from some foster-child sagas. This doesn't have the polish of Paterson's classic *The Great Gilly Hopkins*, but it's still an accessible tale of a girl's tentative but crucial growth. DS

HICKS, BETTY *Animal House and Iz*. Roaring Brook, 2003 172p

Library ed. ISBN 0-7613-2746-0 \$22.90

Trade ed. ISBN 0-7613-1891-7 \$15.95

Ad Gr. 3-6

Elizabeth (Iz) has settled in well with her three stepbrothers; so well, in fact, that she's ready to collude in their Get-a-Dog plan, a covert operation in which the siblings will bring home a string of approved pets (animals that can be left alone for three days) that are so obnoxious the parents will be fairly begging to acquire a nice, normal pooch. Releasing the cricket into the parents' bedroom gains the kids nothing but two overtired, unapproachable adults; feeding the menagerie rich food does produce a desired bout of diarrhea, but it costs the beloved hedgehog its life. Worst of all, the contentious parrot infects brother Jack with psittacosis and lands him in the hospital. Ultimately, though, confessions are made, all is forgiven, and there will be a new addition to the household—a baby. As the predictable dog plot proceeds apace, another storyline follows Iz's mother's efforts to take Iz back into her own custody. Iz's guilt over preferring her stepmother's casual housekeeping and boisterous clan over her own mother's polished formality is certainly credible, but the problem's resolution (Iz's mother consoles herself by getting a dog of her own and offers to dog-sit any pup the new wife's clan may adopt) both diminishes her mother's claims to maternal devotion and stretches the limits of amicable divorce. This isn't as sharp a portrayal of blended family antics as Hicks' *I Smell Like*

Ham (BCCB 10/02), but readers who've crusaded unsuccessfully for pets will be sympathetic. EB

HOLT, KIMBERLY WILLIS *Keeper of the Night*. Holt, 2003 308p
ISBN 0-8050-6361-7 \$16.95

R Gr. 7-12

"My mother died praying on her knees. Her rosary beads were still in her hands when we found her. She left no note, said no good-byes, gave no last hugs or kisses. Only the empty bottle of sleeping pills that had rolled under her bed proved that she'd meant to leave." This bereavement leaves thirteen-year-old Isabel to take care of her increasingly disturbed little brother and sister as her father retreats to his fishing boat. Though it is clear from their memories that Isabel's beautiful mother had been declining in a long depression, none of the members of the extended Chamorro family can deal with the loss; friendships consequently change and Isabel's brother, too, eventually tries to commit suicide. The author of *My Louisiana Sky* (BCCB 6/98) and *When Zachary Beaver Came To Town* (12/99) has moved away from her southern settings to a village on the island of Guam, and from her more traditional narratives to one- or two-page chapters that form a kaleidoscopic impression of Isabel's journey through tumultuous feelings and episodes. This storytelling technique, which draws on observations, poems, lists, and even recipes, results in a sense of fragmentation for the reader; but perhaps that is the point, since Isabel's life has itself been fragmented. As primary characters deepen, secondary characters become familiar, and as the book nears its climax and conclusion, the shifting pieces stabilize into a collage. Isabel's family finally undergoes confrontation and counseling, with hope of healing. The first half of the novel may require patience from young adult readers, but the brevity and rhythm of the segments should carry them toward the dramatic action. An introductory author's note cites Holt's childhood experiences in Guam during her father's military service. BH

HORNIMAN, JOANNE *Mahalia*. Knopf, 2003 184p
Library ed. ISBN 0-375-92325-X \$17.99
Trade ed. ISBN 0-375-82325-5 \$15.95

Ad Gr. 9-12

Life as a new mother proves too much for Emmy, and when she leaves, Matt finds himself a single teen father, looking for a place to live and raise their baby, Mahalia. His mother offers to let them live with her, but Matt wants to prove that he can care for his daughter on his own. He and Mahalia find a house on a street "inhabited almost entirely by people like themselves . . . where untidy lives were lived temporarily and happily." Here Matt grieves the loss of Emmy and tries to decide what he wants to do with his life, but most of his time, his mental energy, and, as a result, the plot of the book, are consumed with the day-to-day trials of having complete care of an infant. Before Mahalia, Matt had no real plans for his future, and her birth does not really energize him in that direction; his only real passion is to be Mahalia's father, and for the time being, caring for her seems to be all he can manage. Horniman provides scant context for the non-Australian to situate the characters, their lifestyles, their homes, or even the social services that constrain and/or enable their choices, but the ethos resonates nonetheless; Matt's longing for Emmy, his conflicted feelings about his dad, and his budding affection for his roommate, Eliza, seep into the reader slowly, rendering him as a character both real and close. Most affecting is his relationship with Mahalia: his senses of won-

der and responsibility are tangible, and though he often experiences her presence as a burden, he feels her absence as a physical pain. The pace is the main problem here; the book moves awfully slowly, but the patient and sensitive reader will find a realistic picture of life with baby and will come away affirmed in the fact that a life connected to such love, difficult though it may be, is ultimately worth the trouble. KC

INGMAN, BRUCE *Bad News! I'm in Charge!*; written and illus. by Bruce Ingman. Candlewick, 2003 [26p]

ISBN 0-7636-2072-6 \$15.99

Reviewed from galleys

Ad 5-8 yrs

Responding to that perennial child fantasy of world domination, this book plays out the predictable scenario of a boy who turns adult rules on their head and lives to regret it. Banished yet again by a mother wielding an enormous index finger ("OUTSIDE NOW! And take that THING with you"), a young boy and his metal detector (the "thing" to which his mother refers) discover a charter that allows him to rule the world. At first the new kid-friendly rules are fun, if banal and clichéd ("Stay up late . . . snacks all the time . . . wild parties every week"), but soon the responsibilities of leadership (again predictable and clichéd—"Kiss babies . . . Launch ship . . . Judge beauty contest") prove too heavy a mantle to bear. The boy delegates his more onerous responsibilities to square-headed men in gray suits so that he can retain the more desirable role of his fantasy as "president of fun." The acrylic illustrations have plenty of energy, especially in their vibrant hues and naïvely drafted figures; squiggly black lines and bits of interpolated collage add to the carnivalesque flavor. The approach becomes forced, however, in the playfully intrusive narration; there are even "terms and conditions for reading" that include "when you get to the end, say, 'Again, please!'" and "no sticky fingers or ripping pages." Rather than capturing a child's perspective, this is clearly an adult playing at a child's perspective, rendering attempts to be cute and conspiratorial more pushy and patronizing. Still, the fantasy is compelling, and it will no doubt spark imaginative adaptations for youthful despotic wannabes. KC

JONES, MELANIE DAVIS *Pigs Rock!*; illus. by Bob Staake. Viking, 2003 32p

ISBN 0-670-03581-5 \$15.99

R 3-5 yrs

The title makes the premise of this musical picture book perfectly clear: the members of a porcine rock-and-roll band get raves from fans ("Fans clap. Fans cheer.// It's the pig rock band they love to hear"). The activities of the piggy band include playing concerts, sleeping late, and hitching a ride on an ice-cream truck after their bus breaks down. The rhyming text, which limns the success of the porcine musicians, has a syncopated rhythm, and the art is slickly digital. Staake's geometric compu-cubism relies on a palette of eggplant, aqua, and other decorator tones. The roly-poly pigs' clothing reflects the breadth of their musical repertoire: the bass player dresses in countrified jeans and a checked shirt, the pianist wears a black suit and sunglasses, the drummer favors beach shorts and flowered shirt, and the lead guitar sports jailhouse stripes (perhaps echoing Elvis in order to "rock with 'Blue Suede Shoes'"). Kids who know enough about rock bands to appreciate the references may find the format somewhat youthful, but listeners who appreciate the backbeat will be ready to do the storytime rock and roll. JMD

KAY, VERLA *Homespun Sarah*; illus. by Ted Rand. Putnam, 2003 32p
 ISBN 0-399-23417-9 \$15.99 R 4-6 yrs

Here's a picture-book preparation—or substitute—for those family trips to historical enactments where everybody walks around in costumes and demonstrates how things were done in the old days. The opening double-page spread sets the pace, which is brisk both in its trochaic dimeter verse ("Homespun Sarah,/ Braided head./ Warm quilt, snuggle,/ Feather bed") and in Rand's dynamic watercolors. Quickening a young viewer's attention is a bright white cutout with a rooster facing an image of the same size on the recto: Sarah's pillowed head, her eyes startled awake by the crowing cock. Subsequent pages are varied in composition and design, with effective use of deep washes and open contrasts in both outdoor and indoor scenes. The process of making a new dress for Sarah, from washing and drying flax through spinning, dyeing, weaving, and sewing, ends the book in a whirl of excitement matched only by the appearance of a big black bear during an earlier berry-picking scene. Despite the enthusiastic presentation, this is not a totally idyllic scenario: the outhouse is smelly, and Mother's skirt burns from the cooking fire; in addition, the author's note tells us—among other things—that children were not allowed to sit or speak during meals and that "a girl would wear her only dress every day for as long as it fit, *even if it was a year or more.*" Pictures of a clean and happy crew belie such hardships, but preschoolers needn't have their introduction to Colonial Pennsylvania be dreary, and surely life in the 1700s featured children as irrepressible as many are today. BH

KOJA, KATHE *Buddha Boy*. Foster/Farrar, 2003 [128p]
 ISBN 0-374-30998-1 \$16.00
 Reviewed from galleys

R Gr. 6-10

The weird, dumpy kid with the dragon t-shirts and perpetual grin is the last person on earth Justin wants to work with on an economics assignment. He soon finds it difficult, though, to ignore Jinsen's awesome artistic ability or to criticize the unflappable calm with which his sophomore classmate accepts ridicule and abuse at school. As their mutual interest in art draws them toward friendship, Justin learns about the tragedies in the boy's life that turned Michael Martin into "Jinsen," whose adherence to Buddhism began as a way to manage a violent temper and became a fulfilling way of life. Understanding and sympathy aren't enough, however, and Justin is forced to take a public stand against bullies out to destroy Jinsen's chances for a prestigious art academy scholarship. Koja enriches a standard do-the-right-thing storyline by exploring, through Justin's perspective, the tension between Jinsen's noble ideals and his unrelenting patience that could itself test the patience of any average teen. Details of a school culture that benignly ignores rampant bullying will, unfortunately, ring true for many readers, but a hope-filled ending for Jinsen will leave spirits at peace. EB

KORNBLATT, MARC *Izzy's Place*. McElderry, 2003 118p
 ISBN 0-689-84639-8 \$16.95

R Gr. 4-6

Ten-year-old Henry is angry: his parents are constantly fighting, and he feels out of control and alone. Since his rage over their fights leads to fits of uncontrollable screaming, his doctor and his parents feel it is best for him to spend the summer with his grandmother. Here, his resentment continues unabated, but it is the

anger of grieving; his beloved grandfather has died, depriving Henry of his favorite companion and most trusted confidant. His expressions of temper are appropriately little-boyish—he is snappish with his grandmother and the neighbor who tries to befriend him, and he gets into a fistfight with a boy his own age with whom his grandmother arranges a play date. When he is injured during a vandal attack on his neighbor's property, he begins to come to terms with his situation, realizing that while his anger can't change anything, it can hurt the people who care about him. Kornblatt passes no overt judgments on Henry's insensitive parents, but it's painfully clear that they are too self-involved to help Henry. However, his neighbor, who is himself grieving the loss of his son Izzy and the impending death of his wife, gently ushers Henry into his more mature understanding of sorrow and welcomes him as a partner in a pain that will never entirely disappear but that may diminish with sharing. While the emotional resolution comes quickly and the gap Izzy has left in his father's life provides a rather convenient space for Henry to fill, the author avoids rosy platitudes and unambiguously happy endings in favor of a satisfyingly plausible experience of intergenerational male bonding. Young readers coping with difficult situations will readily relate to both the grieving and the recovering Henry. KC

KRAFT, ERIK P. *Lenny and Mel's Summer Vacation*; written and illus. by Erik P. Kraft. Simon, 2003 58p
ISBN 0-689-85108-1 \$14.95

R Gr. 2-5

Twin brothers Lenny and Mel are planning an uneventful summer spent lying down—no camp and lots of rest—even though their parents have other ideas. Embracing inertia with a passion usually reserved for sports and/or food, the twins remain as inactive as possible despite their parents' best efforts (a visit to Animal Town, a trip to the library, a vacation in a remote cabin with some very strange-smelling couches, etc.) to engage them in anything other than lolling about. Despite the brothers' insistence on doing as little as possible, the chapters are packed with incident: the boys manage to create inedible lunches out of bologna and old turkey stuffing, individual swimming pools out of garbage bags, and summer-reading book reports out of advertising pamphlets from the drugstore ("The Many Faces of Pimples") and the hardware store ("How to Tell If You Have Termites"). There may not be much narrative depth here, and the characterizations are not exactly complex, but there are some gleeful moments, both between the boys themselves and the boys and their grownups (including a very funny car game of "Donut Pass," inspired by the road sign, "Do Not Pass"). The episodic chapters are given thematic continuity by the organization of the book into the three summer months (June, July, and August) and by the consistently jokey banter between the brothers. Goofy pen-and-ink cartoons add to the slapstick feel of the boys' efforts to do as little as possible. High art this isn't, but hey, it's summer vacation. JMD

KRISHNASWAMI, UMA *Chachaji's Cup*; illus. by Soumya Sitaraman. Children's Book Press, 2003 [32p]
ISBN 0-89239-178-2 \$16.95

Reviewed from galleys

R 6-9 yrs

When he was younger, Neel was very close to Chachaji, his father's uncle; he and his friend Daniel spent hours in his company, playing in the backyard, watching Hindi movies, or hearing stories of Indian history. One of these stories features

Chachaji's mother, who at the partition of India and Pakistan traveled to India carrying a delicate china teacup ("She knew—if this teacup got to India without breaking, she would get to India without breaking"), from which Chachaji now insists on drinking his tea. As Neel grows older, he starts to grow away from the old man, who's showing signs of increasing age; when an inattentive Neel accidentally breaks Chachaji's teacup, that seems to be the harbinger of Chachaji's own downturn. Neel's solution (he glues the cup together, and a restored Chachaji returns home) is somewhat pat, but Krishnaswami unfolds her story gently and unforcedly, and both Chachaji's playful companionability and Neel's drifting away are quietly credible. The included details of Indian history (still largely absent from U.S. literature for young people) are dramatic, and they're carefully chosen for audience accessibility. Sitaraman's draftsmanship sometimes tips from the naïve into the ungainly and awkward on the figures, but the strong, often spicy colors emphasize the warmth of the story, and the solid brushstrokes keep the scenes in memory and description from being too fancifully wispy. There are dramatic stories in many families, and many young people will relate to Chachaji's even as they clamor to tell their own. DS

LEVIN, BETTY *Shoddy Cove*. Greenwillow, 2003 [208p]

Library ed. ISBN 0-06-052272-0 \$16.89

Trade ed. ISBN 0-06-052271-2 \$15.99

Reviewed from galleys

R Gr. 4-8

The fog that rolls in on Cossit Island combines with Clare's work in the nineteenth-century living museum and the mysterious presence of the two apparently homeless children to ignite her imaginative fantasies: are these children really travelers from the past, looking to escape an evil songmaster who sought out runaway slaves on this very island? Reality turns out to be far more prosaic, in the present at least. Adam and his half-sister are in fact runaways, and they enlist Clare's reluctant help in getting word to their relatives so that they won't have to enter foster care. Clare finds herself unable to resist helping Adam and May make contact with his father's family, even though it means lying to her mother and stealing food. Her small moral dilemma mirrors a larger one that the children discover. While hiding out in a secret room (probably a stop on the Underground Railroad), they unearth the story of a murder that took place on the island in 1836, involving a man trying to capture some runaway slaves that the village is hiding from authorities. At issue in both narratives is the commitment to help those who need it, even when such help puts one at moral or physical risk. Both the present dilemma of the children and the historical tale of the escaped slaves are doled out in suspenseful interplay, keeping readers involved until the end. Certain loose ends are left dangling, and readers are left wondering over the success of Adam's and May's integration into their new family, but the treatment of history and its relation to the present are subtly effective and openly engaging. KC

LUBAR, DAVID *Wizards of the Game*. Philomel, 2003 166p

ISBN 0-399-23706-2 \$16.99

Ad Gr. 5-8

Mercer is a passionate fantasy gamer, and his idea to turn the annual eighth-grade charity fundraiser into a gamers' convention should make his Social Studies teacher very happy, bring him closer to luscious but unattainable committee member Michelle, and make him a hero among gamers throughout the region. The third

committee member, Ed, vehemently objects to gaming and launches a newspaper campaign to rally protests against Mercer's project. Here, on an authorial roll of the dice, the plot takes an abrupt twist as four residents of the homeless shelter that will benefit from the fundraiser turn out to be displaced wizards, and Mercer and his gaming buddies try to reopen a portal to return them to their home world. Having unleashed this plot monster, Lubar is hard pressed to tame it. What begins as a lively tale of level-headed kids standing up for their recreational rights spins into a health-class-styled admonition for safe sorcery, as the kids' advertising statues take on evil lives, a monster emerges from the art-room kiln, Donny the janitor (also a wizard, and a heckuva nice guy, too) saves the day, and everyone learns a lesson: "I followed his gaze to the scattered statues, lying like broken corpses on a battlefield. In my mind, I saw what it would be like if they were flesh and blood rather than paper and paste." In the end Lubar's point may be ambiguous, but the battle scene pitting junior high against fantasy forces of darkness will probably make the game worth the candle. EB

LUM, KATE *Princesses Are Not Quitters!*; illus. by Sue Hellard. Bloomsbury, 2003 [32p]

ISBN 1-58234-762-X \$16.95

Reviewed from galleys

Ad 5-8 yrs

Three sisters (Allie, Mellie, and Libby), princesses all, "lived in a huge silver palace by the sea with roses all around." Not satisfied with opulence and wealth, they decide to alleviate their boredom by trading places with three servant girls, because, as Princess Libby says, "Servants have all the fun!" The princesses-cum-servant girls descend upon the housekeeper, Mrs. Blue, who, at their demand, puts them to work. After doing morning chores, the royals are tired, but they continue unflaggingly with their afternoon chores and their evening chores because "they didn't want anyone to say that princesses are quitters." By the end of the night (and after missing all their meals), the three pooped princesses fall into an exhausted sleep. The next day, having washed a laundry load in their maids' aprons, the princesses have an epiphany. Together they make a proclamation establishing servant benefits that would make any union proud: "YOU HAVE TO . . . SLEEP IN every day until nine and WORK no more than you can do and REST whenever you are tired and EAT when you are hungry too and SPEND an hour every day just SITTING in the gardens and HAVE holidays every year and let's have FUN!" The text here is wordy and repetitive, but that won't stop the princess-lovers in the patron pool. The frothy illustrations offset the purposive point of the story with *beaucoup de* bouffant hairdos, poodle crowns, and lots of pink and purple (hair, dresses, wallpaper, furniture, etc.). Touches of visual cleverness (the final page features a copy-worthy coat of arms with domestic tools rampant) add piquancy to the sometimes swirly mélange of lines and shapes. This is overlong for a single readaloud, but group adaptation for a classroom play or into a script for readers' theater would be surely result in a royally funny ruckus. JMD

MALONEY, PETER *Bronto Eats Meat*; written and illus. by Peter Maloney and Felicia Zekauskas. Dial, 2003 32p

ISBN 0-8037-2791-7 \$16.99

R 4-6 yrs

Bronto is a chipper young brontosaurus snacking happily on the tops of trees and other appropriate brontosaurus foods, until one day he comes home "with a *terrrrible*

stomachache." When it gets worse, his parents rush him off to the doctor, whose x-ray reveals that Bronto has inadvertently consumed a wayward young boy named Billy (who had mistakenly thought a treetop was a safe place to hide from his pesky sister). Since there's apparently no surgery in dino-world, there are only three ways to get Billy out, all of them delightfully taboo-breaking: the first way is vomiting, number two—"well, we all know what number two is," and the third is burping. Fortunately for all, number three works quite well, landing Billy back in the bosom of his disbelieving family and relieving Bronto's digestive problems. This isn't the most streamlined story in the world, but it's casually gifted in its ability to bring together an array of irresistible subjects—dinosaurs, eating, bodily functions—and turn them into a jovial and enjoyable plot. The mixed-media illustrations feature popsicle-colored brontosauri with the faces of playground animals; while the hues are somewhat pale and the figures flat, entertaining use is made of compositions (the cutaway of Bronto's swallowing of young Billy uses the full spread vertically) and details (the illustrations of the three possibilities for Billy removal are not in the most scrupulous taste, but they are indeed funny). Not only does this have strong possibilities for traditional venues such as storytime, this is exactly the kind of picture book that older brothers might well enjoy reading to younger siblings. DS

MANNIS, CELESTE DAVIDSON *The Queen's Progress: An Elizabethan Alphabet*; illus. by Bagram Ibatoulline. Viking, 2003 42p
ISBN 0-670-03612-9 \$16.99 R 6-9 yrs

The alphabet is used as an organizing principle in this surprisingly complex and informative book about Queen Elizabeth the First's annual tour through her beloved English countryside. Dominating each spread is an oversized letter in a gold and red brocaded Anglo-Saxon font, around and through which the Queen's caravan makes its slow progress amidst jesters, dancing bears, traveling performers, dancing courtiers, treacherous rogues, and hunting parties. The book tells its story on three levels: a simple quatrain that is keyed to the letter of the alphabet, a textual note that explains the context of the rhymed text, and illustrations that are buzzing with the activities, intrigues, and landscapes of the Queen's tour. Elizabeth is presented as a strong-minded, intelligent, joyous ruler with a deep love for her people and a strong desire to be among them, even though that often entailed personal danger. Both courtiers and peasants are depicted with facial expressions that reflect their stations as well as their responses to the Queen's activities. Ibatoulline's background in textile design shines in the extravagantly ornate fabrics worn by the nobles; the intricate details of the costuming, the frenetic activities of the courtiers, and the playful antics of a frisky little spaniel invite young viewers to linger over the pages. The book appeals on many levels—it is visually arresting, aurally pleasing, and cognitively satisfying. The text and illustrations provide insights into the texture of Elizabethan life that are sure to evoke avid interest; be prepared to answer lots of questions and to direct budding historians to further reading on the subject. KC

MASS, WENDY *A Mango-Shaped Space*. Little, 2003 220p
ISBN 0-316-52388-7 \$16.95

Ad Gr. 5-7

At thirteen, Mia's accustomed to her synesthesia, experiencing sounds and words as visual effects ("The color of the leaf is exactly the same color as Jenna's name—

a bright, shimmering shade of green with some yellow highlights”), and she’s also practiced in keeping it a secret in order to avoid the ridicule she once encountered after sharing the truth about herself with classmates. Increasing trouble with math class leads her finally to confess the truth to her family, however, and to her best friend; as her worried family searches for an explanation, Mia begins to connect with other synesthetes and to find out more about herself. Mia’s narration convincingly and engagingly describes her experience of the world, using such detail that some young readers may wish they too converted their sensory input into visual images, and her relief at finding understanding sharers of that experience is credibly portrayed. Overall, however, the novel never makes a credible case for this experience as a problem, and since that’s where the narrative draws its tension (in addition to a unremarkable side plot about the death of Mia’s cat, Mango), the result is an interesting depiction that never evolves into a compelling story in its own right. Alternative ways of experiencing the world are sufficiently absorbing, though, that young readers may wish to enter Mia’s world just to share her viewpoint. DS

MEDDAUGH, SUSAN *Harry on the Rocks*; written and illus. by Susan Meddaugh. Lorraine/Houghton, 2003 32p
ISBN 0-618-27603-3 \$15.00 R 5-8 yrs

Boatman Harry (a plucky personified Labrador) gets bopped by a seagull who mistakes his head for a rock (upon which to break open a clam), and in the ensuing confusion Harry drops his oars and he and his boat (the *Labradory 1*) are swept out to sea. The unlucky sailor is shipwrecked on a lonely and isolated island where he finds nothing but sand, rocks, “one windblown tree,” and an egg, which he places in the sun to cook. Instead, the egg hatches, and out tumbles a lizard . . . or so Harry thinks. The days pass, the lizard grows wings, and Harry calls him a bizzard (a combination bird and lizard); eventually the bizzard can fly and catch fish—and cook them with his fiery breath. “‘You are not a bizzard,’ said Harry, and suddenly he was very frightened. ‘You are a DRAGON!’” Harry hides from the creature, who finally flies off, only to reappear when Harry is endangered by a storm. The dragon takes Harry home: “‘You saved my life,’ said Harry. He couldn’t help wondering why the dragon had come back. The dragon smiled. ‘Mmmm,’ he said. ‘Mmmmm . . . Mmmmm . . . MOM!’” Meddaugh (author/illustrator of *Martha Speaks*, BCCB 11/92) spins a simple but droll story sure to capture the imaginations of young listeners. The attention-getting opening is just the beginning of a well-paced, cleanly wrought piece of storytelling. The cheerful watercolor and colored-pencil art has a sturdy matter-of-factness that makes the fantasy endearingly domestic, with the sunny orange bizzard an eager and irresistible companion. This will work well as a readaloud for a wide range of ages, since there’s no age cutoff for the desire to have an adoring pet dragon. JMD

MILORD, SUSAN *Willa the Wonderful*; written and illus. by Susan Milord. Houghton, 2003 32p
ISBN 0-618-27522-3 \$15.00 R 5-8 yrs

Young piglet Willa knows exactly what she wants to be when she grows up, so when her teacher (big pig Mr. Lane) assigns the class a project on favorite careers, she does not hesitate for a moment: “Willa wanted to be a fairy princess.” Finding the right (frilly) clothes in her Dress-Up box, she snaps off a handy wand (a branch

from a tree), fills a sack with fairy dust (dirt), and heads off to school. Things don't go quite as planned, however, and by the end of the day a downcast Willa is just about to give up on her chosen career. Fate fortunately steps in, and Willa, magically in the right place at the right time, saves the day and has her faith restored in her future as a fairy princess. Milord's well-paced, good-humored text will scoop up even the most skeptical listener. The connection between fairy-princessing and Willa's climactic rescue may be a bit tenuous, but fantasy is entitled to some leeway with the rules of logic. The acrylic ink, watercolor, and colored pencil illustrations have a cartoony charm, and the close juxtaposition of piglet and princess has an inherent humor bound to elicit giggles from the readaloud crowd. Those concerned with perpetuating passivity can take heart from the fact that Willa's conviction of her fairy princess calling doesn't mean she sits around waiting for magic to make it happen; in a pinch, she waves that wand and takes decisive action. JMD

MONTES, MARISA *Get Ready for Gabí: A Crazy Mixed-Up Spanglish Day*; illus. by Joe Cepeda. Scholastic, 2003 120p
Library ISBN 0-439-51710-9 \$12.95
Paper ed. ISBN 0-439-47519-8 \$3.99

R Gr. 2-4

Third-grader Maritza Gabriela Morales Mercado (Gabí at home) has a problem—Johnny and Sissy, two of her least favorite people in her class, are her partners for a science report about strange and unusual animals. Johnny is a bully who teases Gabí about her name, Sissy is a snob, and they can't agree on what animal to study. A surprise visit from her grandmother helps Gabí solve the problem: her grandmother gives her a tape of the sounds of *coquí*, tiny Puerto Rican tree frogs. When Gabí plays it in class, even Johnny and Sissy agree they want to learn more about the strange and beautiful frogs. Since part of the resolution involves the importance of the accent over the *i* in "Gabí," it's confusing that her name initially appears without it even in Gabí's own first-person narration, and some of the secondary characters are a bit flatly drawn. Gabí and her family are sketched with affectionate detail that makes them particularly attractive, however, and the text is energetic and bouncy, just like the amiable main character; the dialogue is an easy mix of English, Spanish, and Spanglish (a Spanish/English glossary is appended). The cast of characters is decidedly multicultural and the classroom dynamics are, while neat, believable. Short chapters, large typeface, and angular yet jolly line drawings by Cepeda add to the book's accessibility. This is a solid early chapter book (the first in a new series) that knows the audience it wants and reaches it with humor and flair. JMD

MURPHY, JIM *An American Plague: The True and Terrifying Story of the Yellow Fever Epidemic of 1793*. Clarion, 2003 [176p] illus. with photographs
ISBN 0-395-77608-2 \$17.00
Reviewed from galleys

R* Gr. 5-10

The young United States scarcely had time to draw a collective breath after the Revolutionary War when disaster struck the capital city of Philadelphia in the form of mortal epidemic. Murphy, who has covered other historic disasters with laudable insight (*The Great Fire*, BCCB 5/95; *Blizzard*, BCCB 1/01), follows the progress of the disease from its quiet toehold among the *hoi polloi* near the docks, to its spread throughout the city, illuminating the social and political vulnerabilities of the new nation as sickness took its toll. Readers view the panic from several

vantage points: the mayor, who overreaches his elective mandate to impose order on his city; Dr. Benjamin Rush and his medical colleagues, who squabble over cause and cure; the Free African Society, whose brave members nurse in stricken households, only to be accused of profiteering; and the doctor-merchant-barrelmaker team that runs the Bush Hill hospital with compassion and common sense, achieving impressive results. Murphy allows his audience to share the contemporary perplexity by deferring explanations of the nature of yellow fever until the last chapter and by offering scant comfort regarding current measures for mosquito control and the emergence of drug-resistant forms of mosquito-borne diseases. Period illustrations punctuate the text; reproductions of eighteenth-century newspaper articles and documents (particularly death-list excerpts) are truly absorbing. An index is forthcoming, and the list of sources with lively annotation should not be overlooked. EB

MURPHY, MARY *I Kissed the Baby!*; written and illus. by Mary Murphy. Candlewick, 2003 18p
ISBN 0-7636-2122-6 \$12.99

R 1-3 yrs

In a series of positive and negative silhouettes, various animals question ("I saw the baby! Did you see the baby?") and answer ("Yes! I saw the baby, the teeny weeny thing") one another about a new baby. The energetic story is told almost entirely in dialogue, the conversations among the various animals replete with question marks and exclamation points. Splashy, high-contrast graphics feature ink-and-wash animals reminiscent of shadow puppets, all outline and eye with smiling, open crescent-shaped mouths. The occasional touch of neon color along the edge of the pages makes the black-and-white shapes (and typeface) pop. The enthusiastic call-and-response conversations end with a little mouse telling a big duck, "I kissed the baby! Did you kiss the baby?" To which the duck replies, "Of course I kissed the baby, my own amazing baby. And I'm going to do it again! Ppfffwah!" The lemon-yellow duckling (and the page's hot pink text) is a satisfying, surprising shock of color, reinforced on the next page by the sunny duckling's rose-colored "Quack! Quack! Quack!" This is an enthusiastically bouncy book that will delight younglings just figuring out that questions have answers (and accomplishments have exclamation points), as well as families with new babies in the house. JMD

MURPHY, PATTI BELING *Elinor and Violet: Two Naughty Chickens at the Beach*; written and illus. by Patti Beling Murphy. Little, 2003 32p
ISBN 0-316-91034-1 \$15.95

Ad 3-6 yrs

To Elinor's mother's dismay, Violet has come to stay with her grandmother again for the summer ("I don't think Violet is a good influence on you," Elinor's mother clucks). Elinor protests that Violet "has many good ideas," and sure enough, Violet leads Elinor on a merry path of mischief long before they take their clandestine trip to the beach. The friends set Elinor's sisters' alarm clock to go off at 3 A.M., decorate their clothes with permanent marker, steal flowers from a neighbor's garden, and frost cupcakes with shaving cream. Elinor's stints in the time-out chair are presumably what leads her to resist Violet's only really dangerous "good idea"; though she does take the bus to the beach without telling anyone, Elinor won't go into the water without a grownup. The bright gouache illustrations complement the text by showing how the girls' shenanigans are perceived by others, but aside

from the opening scene where Violet appears wearing a "Chicks Rule" T-shirt, Murphy doesn't even flirt with the comic possibilities made available by the fact that these girls are in fact chickens. Instead, this is a clearly didactic tale about peer pressure, and one can't help feel that the energetic and mischievous Violet, carted off to grandma's house for the summer, is being unfairly set up as the foil for well-behaved, well-mothered Elinor. KC

MYERS, WALTER DEAN *Blues Journey*; illus. by Christopher Myers. Holiday House, 2003 [48p]

ISBN 0-8234-1613-5 \$18.95

Reviewed from galleys

R Gr. 3-7

Myers' blues rhapsody is a meandering riff on the heartbreak and joys of life, using traditional blues forms (the call and response pattern) and classic images ("Strange fruit hanging, high in a big oak tree"). Christopher Myers' use of blue ink, brown paper bags, and white paint as the medium for his blue and brown illustrations is a subtle yet thematically effective choice, emphasizing the connections between the blues tradition and the African-American experience. The texture provided by the paper-bag canvas infuses the illustrations with an intense dimensionality reinforced by the broodingly blue figures and the highlights of white that enhance eyes, skies, and other elements. Despite the occasional lack of narrative continuity, the text and the images are a powerful and resonant pair; while the connections between the two are not always immediately apparent, that subtlety provides the necessary pause for reflection demanded by this challenging work. An introduction explains the history and technical components of blues music, including a clear, accessible description of the scale usually used in blues melodies and of the call and response form of the lyrics. A timeline at the conclusion chronicles the development of the blues in the United States; a glossary explains some of the dual meanings of phrases in the text. JMD

O'HAIR, MARGARET *Twin to Twin*; illus. by Thierry Courtin. McElderry, 2003 34p

ISBN 0-689-84494-8 \$15.95

R 2-4 yrs

This airy verse celebrates the everyday joys—and a few of the trials—of life with twins ("Double born, twice the blessing./ Double kids. Twice the messing"). The text is written in (what else?) couplets that cover the range of baby to toddler experience ("Double crawl, then double walk./ Conversation, double talk/// Double giggles when they're glad./ Double tantrums when they're mad"). Although the grammar and subject matter occasionally seem oddly juxtaposed and a tad forced, the scansion never misses, and Courtin's illustrations featuring roly-poly baby bodies and pin-dot eyes pull it all together. The uncluttered composition, large subjects, and bouncy rhymes will carry across a room for a readaloud, but this book seems more suited to the intimacy of a double-cuddle, double-snuggle session. KC

PATTISON, DARCY *The Journey of Oliver K. Woodman*; illus. by Joe Cepeda. Harcourt, 2003 48p

ISBN 0-15-202329-1 \$16.00

R* 5-9 yrs

Tameka really wants her Uncle Ray (who lives in Rock Hill, South Carolina) to come visit her (in Redcrest, California), but he just can't get away. In his place he sends Oliver K. Woodman, a jointed wooden man he himself has crafted. Uncle

Ray leaves Oliver by the side of the highway with a hat, a backpack, a note explaining his ultimate destination, a request that Oliver's benefactors keep Ray apprised of his progress, and a sign that says "California or Bust." As a postcard tells Ray, the first person to pick him up is Jackson McTavish, who takes Oliver as far as Memphis in his truck. The second card comes from Sherry, whose friends bring Oliver to Forest City, Arkansas, and then put him in an aunt's station wagon for a ride to Fort Smith. After trucker Bobbi Jo drives him to New Mexico, he's passed, via her grandfather, to Miss Utah, who hands him over to the wild Claremont sisters (three gray-haired old ladies on a gambling spree); they get him as far as California, where Bernard Grape, attorney at law, delivers him to Tameka's doorstep. Everyone who picks up Oliver sends a note back to Uncle Ray about their adventures until, finally, Tameka herself takes Oliver on the final leg of his journey, from Redcrest back to Rock Hill via airplane. The notes tell the story with a jaunty succinctness, and there's plenty of humor in their varying styles and their tongue-in-cheek but sincere enjoyment of their wooden companion. Cepeda's illustrations (oil over acrylic) have a textured depth that adds complexity while keeping the tone light. Oliver himself gains more and more personality as his journey goes on, achieving a Tin-Mannish reality that makes him more than just a wooden mannikin. Sweeping, changing vistas give a sense of Oliver's passage from East to West, and the notes to Uncle Ray provide a comforting sense of continuity. Partison delivers a mini-quest complete with adventure, danger, and suspense. Youngsters will delight in the whimsy, while the neighborhood may need to keep a close eye on its garden gnomes lest they start taking similar trips. JMD

PAUL, ANN WHITFORD *Little Monkey Says Good Night*; illus. by David Walker. Kroupa/Farrar, 2003 32p
ISBN 0-374-34609-7 \$16.00 R 2-5 yrs

In a bedtime-delaying maneuver that will be familiar to many parents, Little Monkey wants to say goodnight to the entire circus. As Papa Monkey chases Little Monkey through the Big Top tent, Little Monkey says goodnight to Ringmaster, performing Poodle, the clowns, the elephants—you get the picture. Walker's jelly-bean palette with cotton-candy textures is just right for this circus romp; art, monkey, and text swoosh in graceful acrobatic arcs from page to page, swinging little listeners toward their own bedtimes. What really makes this traditional sleep-bargaining narrative stand out is the prize at the end—being able to say goodnight to a mom on the job. Mother Monkey catches her daring darling right in the middle of her trapeze act and flips him artfully down to Papa, to the delight of the crowd. This book is sure to send little ones rocking off to bed with sweet circus dreams of their own. KC

PETERS, JULIE ANNE *Keeping You a Secret*. Tingley/Little, 2003 250p
ISBN 0-316-70275-7 \$16.95 R Gr. 9-12

The result of a teen pregnancy, Holland feels obliged to live the life her mother wasn't able to enjoy by earning good grades, being a school leader, and getting into a good college. Even having a nice boyfriend with whom she practices responsible, boring sex is part of the plan. Enter Cece, a proud, sexy lesbian. Holland's desire for her takes her breath away, and one by one, Holland's mother's expectations dissolve in the wake of Holland's overwhelming love for Cece. Their relationship is flirtatious and delicately embodied in its incipient stages as Holland awakens to

the knowledge that she wants this girl, and Cece waits patiently for Holland to figure that out. When Holland kisses Cece for the first time, she wants to be out to the world, but Cece cautions against it, ostensibly because she wants to save Holland from enduring the hateful reactions of others. As it turns out, Cece has more selfish reasons for wanting to keep their love a secret; having "found" Holland, a beautiful, smart, popular girl, she doesn't want to risk losing her to the rush of lesbian attention that she would assuredly get. As a result, Holland handles her coming out badly; her family and friends feel betrayed and alienated as they learn of her lesbianism through innuendo and rumor. While there is some information about resources available for gay teens embedded in the narrative, there is no heavy-handed agenda here; everyday reality for Holland and Cece has as much joy as difficulty, and they are far too practical to succumb to angst and melodrama over their perfectly ordinary, perfectly wonderful, desire for each other. These are strong, likable young women; readers will warm to their situation and cheer Holland's breaking free from her mother's narrow vision of happiness. KC

POSNER, PAT, ad. *Fantastic Creatures from Greek Myths*; illus. by Olwyn Whelan. Bedrick/McGraw-Hill, 2003 [45p]
ISBN 1-57768-507-5 \$18.95

Reviewed from galleys

Ad Gr. 3-5

Gods and Goddesses from Greek Myths; illus. by Olwyn Whelan. Bedrick/McGraw-Hill, 2003 [45p]
ISBN 1-57768-508-3 \$18.95

Reviewed from galleys

Ad Gr. 3-5

In two bright compilations Posner offers simplified versions of well-known classical Greek myths. *Fantastic Creatures from Greek Myths* contains six tales about heroes and their encounters with mythical monsters, including "Perseus and the Gorgon," "Odysseus and the Cyclopes," and "Theseus and the Minotaur." *Gods and Goddesses from Greek Myths* offers half a dozen stories about the origins and habits of the Greek gods and goddesses, such as "Zeus and the Olympians," "Artemis and Orion," and "Persephone and Hades." Each heavily illustrated volume opens with a brief introduction to classical Greek mythology and concludes with a two-page glossary. The illustrations resemble fancy wrapping paper, rendered in a candy-colored pastel palette and with a naïve simplicity that effectively demystifies characters and events. While the writing is overly casual it is also supremely accessible, making these two titles useful volumes that will reach the intended audience right where it lives—or writes school reports. JMD

POTTER, ELLEN *Olivia Kidney*; illus. by Peter Reynolds. Philomel, 2003 155p
ISBN 0-399-23850-6 \$15.99

R Gr. 5-7

When Olivia Kidney finds herself locked out of her new apartment one day, she discovers a Carrollian cast of characters living in her building—a haughty, deposed princess inhabiting an apartment made entirely of glass, an extremely untalented psychic who takes theappings of the spying princess for messages from the spirit world, a gaggle of raucous children whose mother keeps goats and chickens in her bedroom, and a strange seductress with a diminished, but still dangerous, pirate for a butler. After saving the life of the psychic's son, nearly losing herself to the siren song of the seductress, escaping the murderous designs of the pirate, and helping a young ghost realize that he is in fact dead, Olivia is finally able to achieve

her heart's desire—a renewed relationship with her estranged father and a psychic connection with her dearly departed brother. Because of the pervasive presence of death and loss in the book, all of the rather zany comedic action is edged with melancholy, giving the fantasy a grounded feel and keeping the whole from degrading into a meaningless delirium. Though fearless and feisty, Olivia is also a very sad and lonely little girl, seeking connections with both the humans and the ghosts that people her world. Her own sense of loss leads her to be wary of danger, yet also lends her a remarkable ability to render the compassionate service of friendship to the eccentric people she meets. Readers will agree with the ghosts in the book: Olivia Kidney is a “first-rate kid.” KC

PRESSLER, MIRJAM *Malka*; tr. from the German by Brian Murdoch. Philomel, 2003 [288p]

ISBN 0-399-23984-7 \$18.99

Reviewed from galleys

Ad Gr. 8-12

Malka is a seven-year-old Polish Jew who, with her mother, Hannah, and her sixteen-year-old sister, Minna, escapes a Nazi round-up only because Hannah is a doctor on call at a nearby farm. From there the three of them begin an arduous walk over mountainous terrain to cross the Hungarian border. Malka becomes ill, and Hannah makes a decision to leave her in hiding with a family who subsequently turns her out to fend for herself. At this point the action splits between Hannah's and Malka's excruciating experiences, and their separation intensifies the split viewpoint used throughout the novel. When the narrative focuses on abandoned Malka, readers become so deeply involved that middle-aged Hannah's physical and emotional developments seem distracting; sometimes the transitions between the two characters are confusing as well. This problem, together with an abrupt ending that leaves readers dangling mid-scene when Malka refuses to reunite with her mother, mars the impact of a powerful plot based on historical fact. An author's note cites interviews with the real Malka, who escaped to Israel and who recollected the events on which this novel is based. While many young people will fall by the wayside of the long dual journey, a patient reader will feel the effects of Pressler's acute descriptions and perceptions in a book worth adding to collections of heavily used Holocaust fiction. By the author of *Anne Frank: A Hidden Life* (BCCB 4/00), the text has been unobtrusively translated from German. BH

PRESTON, DIANA *Remember the Lusitania!* Walker, 2003 [112p] illus. with photographs

Library ed. ISBN 0-8027-8847-5 \$23.85

Trade ed. ISBN 0-8027-8846-7 \$22.95

Reviewed from galleys

R Gr. 5-8

The 1915 sinking of the *Lusitania* was, of course, both a civilian maritime tragedy and an act of war. In this distillation of her adult title *Lusitania: An Epic Tragedy*, Preston's focus lists toward the former, as she notes but does not deeply plumb such issues as the German Embassy's published warnings that British ships were subject to attack and the possibility that U-boat commander Walther Schweiger overstepped his orders in launching the torpedo. Her description of shipboard life (which follows families in three classes of *Lusitania* accommodations and the crew of the U-20), the opulence and austerity of the two vessels, and reaction to the sinking among both ill-fated passengers and German crew are delivered in a blaze

of first-rate storytelling. Most material is derived from a broad spectrum of primary sources, from government documents to contemporary journalism to survivor interviews, and this adherence to firsthand accounts pays off in the riveting immediacy of Preston's prose. Plentiful illustrations (including historical photographs, documents, and maps) help bring the presentation well within the grasp of able younger readers, and a selection of further readings, as well as a bibliographic essay, will direct researchers to works on the ship's sinking and exploration of the wreckage. EB

PROVENSEN, ALICE *A Day in the Life of Murphy*; written and illus. by Alice Provensen. Simon, 2003 34p
ISBN 0-689-84884-6 \$16.95

R 4-6 yrs

"Murphy-stop-that is my name. I am a terrier. I bark. I bark at anything and everything and all the time." Murphy's other chief preoccupation is food, naturally enough, and he focuses on it with single-minded intensity. The contrast between this bristly little gray terrier and his barnyardmate, the laid-back, leggy brown hound that trails after him, adds considerable humor to the day, which starts with a competitive dawn dash to scour the kitchen floor for snacks and proceeds through a chaotic schedule of cat-chasing, mouse alerts, and a visit to the vet ("I think I may have to throw up"). The dinner table features crumbs and hand-outs. Nighttime affords a wild flurry of barking that translates into Murphy's storytelling to all the animals in the barn: "Was it a rat? A fox? A skunk? A wolf? A bear? A thief? The moon! The moon! I heard the moon move!" Finally, the hay makes a comfy bed, with sock, bone, and stick nearby. Provensen's figures are clear and stable. Her flat perspective and childlike drafting characterize landscapes and domestic scenes with clean lines and handsomely modulated colors. Murphy's frequent and expressive head-on stares are visually engaging, while his monologue is tonally authentic and impudently anthropomorphic. Preschoolers may recognize in Murphy's behavior the shades of toddler siblings or, in hyper moments, themselves. BH

RIPLINGER, JON *How I Fell in Love & Learned to Shoot Free Throws*. Roaring Brook, 2003 [178p]

Library ed. ISBN 0-7613-2747-9 \$22.90

Trade ed. ISBN 0-7613-1892-5 \$15.95

Reviewed from galleys

R Gr. 7-12

Seventeen-year-old Danny Henderson has a reasonably cunning plan: he's going to get close to the girl of his dreams, ace basketball player Angel McPherson, by asking her to coach him on his free throws (and since they really do need improvement, her basketball skills are a considerable plus). Though his overtures are initially stymied by the fiercely private Angel, Danny persists; as the two become closer, he discovers what she's hiding—she's the daughter, by artificial insemination, of a lesbian mother—but he remains afraid to share his own secret. The teens' revelations function more like soap opera than genuine emotional drama in the context of the book (Angel histrionically refers to herself as a "test-tube baby"), but the romance is definitely an appealing one. Capable Angel isn't your usual heroine, so there's an extra spice to the traditional (and enjoyable) story of winning over the girl who's afraid of getting what she wants. More interesting than Danny's family secret (his mother, who ostensibly died of cancer, actually was

killed in an accident along with her lover) is Danny's relationship with his father, who's the athletic director at Danny's school and who's more complicated than the misogynistic jock he initially appears to be. Though particularly gratifying to girls worried they'll have to choose between romance and athletics, this has enough solid plot and relationship exploration to draw to a broad range of readers. DS

RODARI, GIANNI *One and Seven*; tr. from the Italian by David Anglin; illus. by Beatrice Alemagna. Mariuccia Iaconi, 2003 [24p]

ISBN 0-9628720-6-7 \$17.95

Reviewed from galleys

Ad 5-7 yrs

"I knew one child," says the narrator of this humanistic fable, "who was 7 children": he's Paolo in Rome, Jean in Paris, Kurt in Berlin, Yuri in Moscow, Jimmy in New York, Chu in Shanghai, and Pablo in Buenos Aires, but everywhere he "was eight years old and already knew how to read and write and rode his bicycle without holding onto the handlebars." That commonality is why, once they're grown up, they "will no longer be able to make war against one another." Andersen medal-winner Rodari is one of Europe's most significant writers for children, but this tale, which originally appeared in a collection, fares poorly as a standalone picture-book text: though the softly turned phrases keep the text from becoming heavy-handed, it's evanescent instead, lacking any plot, and the *e pluribus unum* theme isn't hugely original. Alemagna's artwork turns the oversized pages into dramatic, childlike portraiture. The scribbly textures and sharp, doodly features recall the work of Brian Karas, but the intense closeups and elaborate cityscapes have an artistic spirit all their own. This will ultimately appeal more to adults than to children, but the attractive art will make it more palatable if it's used for Sunday school lessons or other ethical discussions. DS

RUBEL, NICOLE *Grody's Not So Golden Rules*; written and illus. by Nicole Rubel. Silver Whistle/Harcourt, 2003 32p

ISBN 0-15-216241-0 \$16.00

Ad Gr. 1-3

Once again, an assault is launched at the oppressive rules imposed on kids by well-meaning adults (see Ingman, above) as Grody, a very stylish young dog with startlingly round eyes, rewrites rules of health, hygiene, and civility according to kid logic. Why get up in the morning when "you're just going to have to go to bed again at night"? And if you do get up, why brush teeth that will just get dirty at breakfast? Grody challenges rules at school as well as at home: "Always talk when the teacher is talking. That way you get to leave the classroom. You can always start again next year." Each of Grody's rules is founded on inarguably sound reasons that are belied by the illustrations, which show the inevitable consequences of the new maxim. Indeed, the collage art of the text is as chaotic as the world Grody's rules would inaugurate. For the most part, the illustrations are crowded cartoons, but mixed in with the cartoon images are overlays of photographed fabrics and textures, digitally manipulated photographs of food, lamps, vases, flowers, pets, etc. and patterned optical illusions that make the eyes swim. The inspired anarchy of the ensemble comes to a crashingly disappointing end with rule 14: "Don't follow my rules or you will look just like me-eeeeeeeeee!" Grody appears here labeled with the exaggerated consequences of following his rules, including "very dirty ears," "countless cavities," "powerfully bad breath," "failing grades," etc. It's a bit of pointless overkill rather than a satisfying conclusion, and it ends up scoring one more point for the grownups. KC

RUMFORD, JAMES *Nine Animals and the Well*; written and illus. by James Rumford. Houghton, 2003 32p

ISBN 0-618-30915-2 \$16.00

R 6-10 yrs

Nine animal friends on the way to a birthday celebration for the raja-king debate—and doubt—the merits of their gifts. Each animal—Monkey, Rhino, Camel, Rabbit, Cow, Cobra, Elephant, Tiger, Peacock—is convinced he has the best gift, until he sees the gift another carries. Comparing, tossing, and sharing gifts results in the ultimate loss of all (the final gift of nine golden coins rolls into a well), and the animals are left without a present but with a great story. Rumford (author of *Traveling Man*, BCCB 12/01, and *Seeker of Knowledge*, 4/00) effectively crafts this original, fable-like tale around a surprising underlying element: the historical travels of what we call Arabic numerals. A brief introduction neatly displays number signs from various stops along the way, explaining, “We got our nine number signs and the zero from the Europeans, who got them from the North Africans, who got them from the Arabs, who got them from the Indians of India.” The animals carry numerically cumulative presents (one loaf of bread, two mangoes, three cakes, four cones of sugar, etc.), and even the shapes of the animals themselves are inspired by the Indian numerals. The stylized art (paper collage decorated with brush, pen, and pencil) is lightened by the animals’ expressions of joy and dismay and the vivid palette, which leans toward shades of red, gold, and green, with background colors and borders in intense hues. This is a rich picture book that can be used on many levels, whether telling stories, teaching math, or discussing history. A concluding note gives a bit more information about the numerals’ travels. JMD

SCHERTLE, ALICE *Teddy Bear, Teddy Bear*; illus. by Linda Hill Griffith. HarperCollins, 2003 32p

Library ed. ISBN 0-688-16871-X \$16.89

Trade ed. ISBN 0-688-16870-1 \$15.99

Ad 3-6 yrs

Fourteen poems feature those cuddly bruins indispensable to youthful emotional lives, discussing bears in various locations (“Teddy Bear Store”), bears enjoying—or suffering—various activities (“Scrub-a-Dub”), and aspects of bear existence (“Teddy Bear Wear”). The talented Schertle (author of *How Now, Brown Cow*, BCCB 12/94) doesn’t quite hit her usual mark here, with some poems lacking her familiar inventiveness or suffering from a wavering rhythm. There are plenty of enticing bearish details, however, and when the verses succeed (as in “Barely Bear”), there’s an A. A. Milneish cuddliness to the result. Griffith’s teddy portraiture is unfortunately a far cry from Ernest Shepard’s understated coziness, though: slick and overcrowded full-page images jar with Schertle’s tone and sometimes miss opportunities offered by the verse; the bears are, however, marketably appealing, if a bit samey from picture to picture. The listener’s own teddy is probably the best visual for this poetry anyway, and youngsters may well find some of these entries just the thing to serenade bear and owner at bedtime. DS

SEDGWICK, MARCUS *The Dark Horse*; written and illus. by Marcus Sedgwick. Lamb/Random House, 2003 217p

Library ed. ISBN 0-385-90091-0 \$17.99

Trade ed. ISBN 0-385-73054-3 \$15.95

Ad Gr. 5-8

Sigurd (usually called Sig) and his young foster sister, Mouse, find a strange wooden box on the beach while searching for food. The box belongs to a shipwrecked

stranger, Ragnald, who ingratiates himself with the community Lawspeaker, Horn, in order to get it back. After the village leaders are killed in a brutal fight over the box, sixteen-year-old Sig defeats a challenge by Sif, Horn's daughter, and becomes Lawspeaker. He has little time for learning about his new influence however; shortly after he takes his position as leader of Storn, the village is attacked by the Dark Horse, a horse-riding clan that loots and destroys villages, killing the inhabitants. A small group of Storn escape, Sig and Mouse among them, but Mouse betrays them to the Dark Horse, and they are captured. Offered the option of life and slavery or death, Sigurd and the remaining Storn choose death, only to be rescued by Sif, who returns in time to save them. The format of the novel—Sigurd's first-person account alternates with a third-person narration—effectively draws in the reader while providing enough detail to make the intricate story understandable. Mouse, the strange child who was raised by wolves and who can communicate with animals, is capably developed, and Sigurd, too, is believable as an intelligent young man not so bound to tradition that it blinds him to circumstance. Unfortunately, the relationship between Sigurd and Mouse is just too close to make her concluding betrayal (despite the revelation about her origins) credible; in addition, the consequences of her betrayal are so great that Sigurd's allowing her to escape isn't convincing, either. Nevertheless, the pace is steady if not swift, the suspense is palpable, and the relationship between Mouse and Sig, at least until the end, is grounded in emotional reality. Those readers who tingle at the notion of ancient tribes engaged in ritual and warfare will find enough here to keep the pages turning. JMD

SIMMONS, MICHAEL *Pool Boy*. Porter/Roaring Brook, 2003 164p

Library ed. ISBN 0-7613-2924-2 \$22.90

Trade ed. ISBN 0-7613-1885-2 \$15.95

R* Gr. 7-12

Brett's cushy life in his well-off family came to a screeching halt when his stockbroker father was sent to prison for insider trading. Now he, his mother, and his younger sister are living with his aunt, on the wrong side of the tracks, where he's bitter through and through about the changes in his existence; on family visits to his father, he takes great pleasure in dishing out denigration ("I could say things like, 'Hey Dad, you're a loser and an idiot,' and he'd be sitting behind a big Plexiglass window and couldn't do anything"). After failing at his hated fast-food job (a failure, Brett is sure, that is everybody's fault but his), he falls into a job cleaning pools with seventy-year-old Alfie, a local character who used to drive Brett's school bus years ago and who soon becomes a valuable friend and advisor for the unhappy teen. Simmons is absolutely superb in his creation of Brett's narrative voice: the teen is completely credible in his self-centered and materialistic bitterness, while managing to stay sympathetic to readers because of his understandable anger and his genuine, if awkwardly expressed, love for the rest of his family. The book is perceptive about the pleasures of punishing those who have hurt us and the dilemma of finding ways to do it without hurting others, and it never strays from the authentic even when depicting Brett's growth and forgiveness ("I still hate Dad for blowing everything and losing the house and the pool. . . . But maybe I hate him in a different way than I thought"). His relationship with Alfie isn't unusual in literature for young people, but it's depicted with an understated subtlety that nonetheless makes their connection clear and renders Brett's grief at Alfie's death credible and touching. Even readers who initially find it hard to forgive Brett's

arrogance will understand the pain of losing cool stuff, and Simmons' stellar narrative will elicit compassion from any teen who's had reason to be angry with a parent. DS

SPINELLI, EILEEN *Moe McTooth: An Alley Cat's Tale*; illus. by Linda Bronson. Clarion, 2003 32p
ISBN 0-618-11760-1 \$15.00 R 5-8 yrs

Moe McTooth is a contented alley cat, relishing his roaming adventures ("And life was good") until winter comes, and cold, wet, and hunger eradicate the pleasures of his existence. Fortunately, he's taken in and cherished by a young woman; come spring, however, an open window calls him back to his old life, and he's outta there. Eventually, Moe sensibly misses the charms of the cozy indoors, returning to his delighted not-quite-owner for comfy domestic days and wandering through the alluring streets at night in a fine and satisfying compromise (and one the young woman herself embraces, following Moe out into the night). In-and-out cat stories aren't exactly rare, but Spinelli gives this one an understated grace. Her poetic specifics provide apt imagery ("By day he chased after dockside trucks for sardines that spilled like silver into his mouth") that heighten the storytelling without turning it frothy or whimsical, and her careful use of repetition, especially dramatic employment of anaphora, give the story a clear rhythm and shape. Bronson's art isn't the match for the text that one might hope, since it's more stylized than compelling, lacking Spinelli's delicacy. There's an pleasing rhythm, however, to the cubist-infused draftsmanship, with fisheye-lens curves of the landscape and interior scenes rhyming with the sinuous curves of the cat. The oils make the blue-purple nocturnal scenes into luminous fantasias while ensuring that the rich orange Moe is always the focus. Cats and adventures are a perennially winning combination, and listening youngsters will immediately want to hunt for their own alley cat or follow their own feline rambles out into the night. DS

SPINELLI, JERRY *My Daddy and Me*; illus. by Seymour Chwast. Knopf, 2003 34p
Library ed. ISBN 0-375-90606-1 \$17.99
Trade ed. ISBN 0-375-80606-7 \$15.95 R 2-5 yrs

Though the illustrations feature a puppy and grown dog, the story here is pure human daddy and child: a young boy gleefully greets his returning father, they enjoy various playful family rituals, they work around the house and yard, they regale the neighbor with musical and dance performances, and, most importantly, Daddy provides the lullaby when it's bedtime for the young narrator. While many real dads will envy the seemingly inexhaustible patience, repertoire, and energy of the featured father, the individual components of the father-child relationship are exuberantly realistic, from piggyback rides ("Hey," says Daddy, "who's this cowpoke riding me?") to home maintenance ("When the house breaks, we have to fix it. My job is to carry the toolbox and hand Daddy the hammer"); cumulatively, they're a delicious fantasy of an evening with Dad all to yourself and doing all your favorite things. While it's a little strange that the very human parent-child pair are pictured as canine, there's one distinct advantage—aside from one easily alterable textual mention of the "Boy of the Day," there are no gender commitments, so this could be a nice father-centered treat for girls as well. Chwast's thickly daubed brushstrokes lend the figures and scenery a papier-mâché feel; while the figures are

therefore sometimes rather stiff, the toylike simplicity of the rounded, canine-inhabited world enhances its appeal to the young audiences, who will enjoy the paternal adventures all the more for their sprightly decoration. This is a natural for a father-centered storytime; be prepared for a lot of stories, both real and fanciful, about the skills and wonders of the audience's own daddies. DS

STEIG, WILLIAM *When Everybody Wore a Hat*; written and illus. by William Steig. Cotler/HarperCollins, 2003 34p

Library ed. ISBN 0-06-009701-9 \$18.89

Trade ed. ISBN 0-06-009700-0 \$17.99

Ad 5-7 yrs

Steig's *New Yorker*-graphic style comes on strong here as he depicts his childhood starting at age eight in 1916. Bookending the watercolor cartoons, which are dominated by bright greens and tan, are black-and-white photographs of William as child and elder. In between, the observations of life in his immigrant family and Bronx neighborhood are accessible in terms of picture-book history but randomly scattered rather than cohesively sequenced. For instance, on one page Mom is crying over sad news from the Old Country, which scares the children; on the next, "Pop was an expert rower." Not until nine pages (or six images) later do we see a possible source of the bad news, "a big war going on in Europe. It was World War I"—this illustrated by a bleeding German cavalry officer and a legs-up dead horse. After that we meet the janitor's dog. Even the sequential pictures of various workmen are not supported by the text. An unidentified grocer is shown under a line about a mouthy neighborhood girl, which is separated from "our butcher" by one page about the value of nickels and by another stating that "we moved a lot. The moving men were very strong" (and possibly cannibalistic, from the size of the representative's teeth). The compositions and page design are spacious and the signature Steig twists of visual humor suggest scenes from theater of the absurd, and individually, each page is effective in the manner of a vividly evocative scrapbook. Overall, Steig has stayed in his own framework of reference rather than relating to a young viewer's, so adult fans will need to fill in some blanks with storytelling connections of their own for young listeners. BH

VAN LEEUWEN, JEAN *The Amazing Air Balloon*; illus. by Marco Ventura. Fogelman, 2003 32p

ISBN 0-8037-2258-3 \$16.99

Ad 5-8 yrs

When eighteenth-century Baltimore innkeeper Peter Carnes was stricken with hot-air-balloon mania, he arranged for a public display of several consecutive tethered ascents. Extant documents report that a thirteen-year-old boy named Edward Warren volunteered to go aloft on "the last trip into the air, and behaved with the steady fortitude of an old voyager." Nothing more is known of Edward, but Van Leeuwen fills in pages of blanks with a heavily fictionalized account that presents the boy as an orphaned apprentice to a blacksmith, who kindly gives him time off to chase errant balloons and travel to Baltimore for the historic flight. When Carnes demurs from making an ascent himself (in this tale due to credible concerns about his weight), Edward steps forward for his chance of a lifetime. Ventura's stiffly mannered oil paintings tidy up 1784 Baltimore, countryside, and citizenry to Disneyland-ish standards, and the balloon ascent, when it finally arrives, is a bit of a visual letdown. Of more interest are the document reproductions that constitute the endpapers and Van Leeuwen's closing note on Carnes' subsequent (and

short-lived) ballooning efforts. For a more involving account of early aeronautics, consider Wallner's *The First Air Voyage in the United States* (BCCB 5/96) EB

VENABLES, STEPHEN *To the Top: The Story of Everest*. Candlewick, 2003 96p illus. with photographs
ISBN 0-7636-2115-3 \$17.99 R Gr. 6-12

There have been a lot of Everest titles in the last few years (Jenkins' *To the Top of the World*, BCCB 4/99, Pfetzer's *Within Reach*, 11/98), but this one offers what the others haven't: a thorough and detailed history of the mountain and its climbing. Venables touches on geology, meteorology, and politics as he covers both early history and the twentieth-century expeditions that changed Everest from untouched to booked years in advance. His personal knowledge (Venables reached the top in 1988) informs the prose, but he includes his own account as a part of the bigger climbing picture rather than as the reason for the book, and his detailed chronicles of the progress and innovations in expeditions are informative and enlightening. This is also one of the few books that gives full and genuine credit to the Sherpa climbers, whose individual records often surpass those of their paymasters (there's as much biographical information for Tenzing Norgay as for Edmund Hillary, and it's noted that the first person to summit twice was Tenzing's nephew, Nawang Gombu). The narrative is a bit thick with technical material for those just looking for adventure, but there are still plenty of thrills, chills, misfortunes (the author includes a grisly picture of his soon-to-be-amputated toes), and tragedy to keep readers interested. Generous employment of arresting period and contemporary photographs (many in color) adds considerable interest, and thoughtful and varied layout (particularly good use is made of white text on deep-blue background) adds impact as well as breaking up the solid text. Route maps, a glossary, and an index are included, as is a note on the Royal Geographic Society and its Mount Everest Foundation, which sponsors many expeditions. Armchair travelers who want to know how as well as who will find this a bracing literary climb. DS

WAITE, JUDY *Shopaholic*. Atheneum, 2003 [208p]
ISBN 0-689-85138-3 \$16.95
Reviewed from galleys R Gr. 6-9

Fourteen-year-old Taylor is on her own with her mother now, since the departure of her father and the death of her younger sister; she might as well be on her own entirely, since her mother's severe depression makes Taylor the mainstay of the household. Already growing away from her friends under her familial burden, Taylor becomes entranced with Kat, a glamorous girl she meets out shopping. Shopping, in fact, becomes the core of their relationship, since that's what seems to attract Kat, and Taylor begins to supply Kat with loans for purchases in fear that Kat will withdraw her friendship if the shopping opportunities dry up. British novelist Waite overplays Taylor's tragic secret (she blames herself for her sister's drowning), thereby somewhat undercutting the main plot, which plays out perfectly credibly in its own right; the book is squarely authentic about Taylor's anger at her mother, however, and about the familiarity a dysfunctional routine can acquire. It's the shopping/friendship nexus where the book really sparkles, though, just like all those seductive unbought clothes in the shiny stores, with just enough detail about every item of apparel and tube of lipstick to allow readers to sympa-

thize with the allure and to understand that the possibilities offered go beyond mere clothing. Shopping is such a central activity in a lot of teens' lives that it's surprising there's been so few books that really address it; without heavy-handedly hammering home the moral of responsibility, Waite captures the pleasures and temptations of the mall. DS

WARD, HELEN *The Dragon Machine*; illus. by Wayne Anderson. Dutton, 2003 32p
ISBN 0-525-47114-6 \$15.99 R 6-9 yrs

Young George sees things other people (e.g., grownups) don't see: "George noticed his first real dragon on a rainy Thursday. And the more he looked, the more dragons he saw. Ignored and overlooked, the dragons went unnoticed . . . just like George." Realizing the dragons (who are now following the boy about because he fed them "stale cookies and smelly cheese") need to be removed to a place of safety, he builds a dragonsque flying machine and takes off for the part of the map that says "Here Be Dragons" ("His dragon machine lumbered, engine ticking gently, into the night sky. And the dragons followed"). After his machine crash-lands in the wilderness, the dragons scatter, and a lonely George is recovered by his newly attentive parents ("George and his dreams of dragons went home"). Ward, adapter and illustrator of such classic fables as *The King of the Birds* (BCCB 11/97), makes this dreamlike journey a compelling one, with unerring fantasy logic and smooth storytelling; her clever use of the name George, traditionally the dragon slayer, is a nice touch. Anderson's illustrations have a Peter Sís-like quality to them; vignette and full-page images, subtly colored and nubbly textured, feature slightly altered states where the mundane combines with the magical to produce dreamscapes rendered with airy solidity. This will make an unusual, thoughtful addition to storytimes for not-quite-readers and possibly even a readalone for adventurous independent readers with dragons on their minds. JMD

WARHOLA, JAMES *Uncle Andy's*; written and illus. by James Warhola. Putnam, 2003 32p
ISBN 0-399-23869-7 \$16.99 Ad Gr. 3-5

Warhola, nephew of pop artist Andy Warhol, tells of youthful visits to his uncle's New York house, which was "filled to the brim with all sorts of neat things." Some of those neat things came from Warhola's father, a junk dealer, who brought his brother some particularly interesting bits of refuse (much to the dismay of Warhola's mother, who "really didn't understand art"), and some of them were Warhol creations ("In the morning, I noticed that I was surrounded by towers of soup boxes"), but all of them fascinated young James, who reveled in playing, along with his siblings, in the overstuffed house. Warhola's writing is somewhat pedestrian, and it's not entirely clear that his famous uncle relished these spontaneous visits as much as the young lad believed; this is also, unlike Hartfield's *Me and Uncle Romie* (BCCB 1/03), a title whose impact depends on knowing about the artist himself. As visits to relatives go, however, this is a reasonably entertaining one, and collection-prone youngsters will envy the house where even the most unprepossessing item is sacrosanct. In contrast to Warhol's art, Warhola's illustrations have a robust middle-American normality, with solid round-cheeked figures that suggest a cross between Fisher-Price and Norman Rockwell. The art doesn't always make the most of the setting, but there are some enticing views of clutter and one allur-

ing cutaway, as well as casual depictions of the famous figure of Warhol himself. This will be more effective if used in conjunction with a more explanatory title about Warhol, but kids will readily take to the message: "I really liked doing art, and I learned that art is something that is all around us all of the time." DS

WEST, TRACEY *Me and My Robot*; illus. by Cindy Revell. Grosset, 2003 32p (All Aboard Reading)
Library ISBN 0-448-43140-8 \$13.89
Paper ed. ISBN 0-448-42895-4 \$3.99 R Gr. K-2

Our protagonist, Reese, has a robot (conveniently named Robot), who's every bit the boon companion a youngster would expect a robot to be. When Reese's friend Lucy loses her kitten, Robot seems like a useful ally, but since Reese is a bit imprecise on the search terms, Robot keeps turning up the wrong critter ("That is not my kitten!" Lucy says repeatedly). A photograph solves the problem and clues Robot in, and it turns out that Lucy's kitten has been enjoying a cozy snooze inside Robot's own console ("I LIKE KITTENS!" says Robot). This manages to carry off more plot and momentum than many beginning readers, and the repetition of phrases, for which novice readers will be sincerely grateful, enhances the storytelling rather than seeming forced into it; kids will also appreciate the plot engine of a mistake-making scientific wonder, since as readers they're likely feeling pretty fallible themselves. Though the compositions are sometimes a little scattershot, the illustrations' thick, grainy brushstrokes and deep pigments give the artwork a robustness unusual in beginning readers, and there's a goofy excess to the absurd figures of the animals. Those still struggling with the printed word will appreciate the extra appeals here. DS

WESTON, MARTHA *Act I, Act II, Act Normal*. Roaring Brook, 2003 148p
Library ed. ISBN 0-7613-2859-9 \$22.90
Trade ed. ISBN 0-7613-1779-1 \$15.95 Ad Gr. 5-7

Tophers loves acting, and nothing—not being labeled geeky or gay, not having to star in a babyish play based on a fairy tale, not being tortured by the Scary Losers in his eighth-grade class—will keep him from the stage. He's therefore happy indeed to land the lead role in a musical version of *Rumpelstiltskin*, even though that production beat out the original play of his best friend, Kip, in the playwriting contest. Kip's a good sport, however, who even runs lines with Tophers when Lyndsey, the female lead, finds one excuse or another not to practice. Tophers presses on, dealing as best he can with a bossy writer who wants to dictate how people perform their lines, a distraught diva who doesn't feel that her character has enough feminist spunk, and a group of bullies who are constantly questioning his sexual orientation because of his allegiance to the theater. Despite various setbacks (oh, the drama of middle-school theater!), the show is a success, even when the female lead gets sick and Kip has to perform her role in drag. Meanwhile, Tophers' beloved cat, Button, who is suffering from diabetes, goes into seizures and has to be put down the night before the show. The two plots (the production of the play and the loss of Button) run parallel to each other, but no connection is made, either affectively or metaphorically, between the two, and the book suffers from a rather too convenient ending that capitalizes on the effeminiphobia that it seems to want to challenge. Nonetheless, there is a dearth of attention to the theater-loving boy in literature for this age; this book addresses that gap. KC

WILLARD, NANCY *The Mouse, the Cat, and Grandmother's Hat*; illus. by Jenny Mattheson. Little, 2003 32p
ISBN 0-316-94006-2 \$14.95

Ad 3-5 yrs

Using traditional motifs, Willard launches a cumulative tale that doesn't quite accumulate: "This is Grandmother's hat./ This is the mouse that hid under Grandmother's hat./ This is the cat . . . / that waits to be fed,/ that mewed for the mouse/ that tried to play dead/ under Grandmother's hat." Then viewers are introduced to a birthday cake, a gathering of relatives, and back to the escaped mouse "that tickled my shoe/ as I carried the cake," which rolls out the door like a gingerbread man with the whole cast in fast pursuit. But what's this at the end? "I hear a bee/ in Grandmother's purse." The implication that things will start all over again may get lost in the sudden switch of subject and simply leave young listeners dangling. On the other hand, Willard is a veteran at the emphatic rhyming of nonsense that makes sense, as she was in her Newbery Medal book, *A Visit to William Blake's Inn* (BCCB 12/81). The doll-like Edwardian characters that populate Mattheson's illustrations roll across the pages in a purple and apricot glow that unfortunately mutes the romping energy of the text. Like Richard Egielski's figures in Pam Conrad's *The Tub People* (11/89), this round-eyed family seems vaguely to resemble the portly Fisher-Price characters inhabiting ubiquitous play barns, garages, and playhouses, though they don't quite muster the Tub People's individuality. While overall this is somewhat short on impact, familiarity of verbal and visual forms may breed appreciative response. BH

WILSON, SARAH *Big Day on the River*; illus. by Randy Cecil. Holt, 2003 32p
ISBN 0-8050-6787-6 \$16.95

Ad 5-8 yrs

Willie is looking forward to her time on the river, "joyful to be alone and grinning ear-to-ear." She jumps onto the old raft that awaits her at the end of the dock and prepares for a happily solitary afternoon on the Wallawatchee, but it is not to be. One after another, her well-meaning relatives race to the end of the dock with something that she just has to have for her voyage: apples, a watermelon, an umbrella, a blanket, a bicycle, a rocker, and more, until finally, with the addition of one last item (Cousin Clyde in full cannonball) the inevitable happens: "Willie's little raft promptly sank." The sinking results in all the relatives leaping into the river, and after everyone "straggled back to shore with their rescued flotsam," Willie finally speaks up: "I love you all to popping, but *please* take back these wondrous things! All I *really* need . . . are your hugs, your kisses, and your *very* best wishes!" The text is overlong and excessively perky, but there is a cheery insanity about these well-intentioned grammas, grampas, aunts, uncles, and cousins that almost makes up for the tendency towards contrivance in the countrified dialogue and the rather static plot. Cecil (illustrator of Lowell's *Little Red Cowboy Hat*, BCCB 6/97, etc.) uses acrylic gouache to create a sunny summer atmosphere, and between the blue of the sky and the green of the hills, the Wallawatchee and its environs are invitingly bucolic. The surface finish of the paintings is texturally undifferentiated, making the compositions a bit flat; the human figures, however, have a comfortably rounded, dePaola-ish look. Images sprawl from spread to spread, large enough to be seen by a viewing group and colorful enough to keep even roving eyes from wandering. This will make a summery end-of-school-year (or anytime) readaloud for the early grades, especially if listeners are looking out the window wishing for the bell. JMD

PROFESSIONAL CONNECTIONS: RESOURCES FOR TEACHERS AND LIBRARIANS

BENTON, GAIL *Ready-to-Go Storytimes: Fingerplays, Scripts, Patterns, Music, and More*; by Gail Benton and Trisha Waichulaitis. Neal-Schuman, 2003 239p illus.

Paper ed. ISBN 1-55570-449-2 \$59.95

Benton and Waichulaitis have offered story programs at the City of Mesa Library in Arizona since 1992, and here they share their practical expertise in an accessible and adaptable format. The authors build on the traditional storytime format of readalouds, fingerplays, action rhymes, and flannel or magnet board stories, spiced with brief sing-alongs and parent-child activities. Six theme-based storytimes (Yum Yum, Animal Tales, Desert Dash, Beach Party, Color Wheel, and Dressin' Up) are offered with instructions and content (the only thing not included is the read-aloud book, but a suggested title is given), followed by the patterns for flannel boards, puppets, activity cards, activity sheets, etc. used in the program. The programs are more story-activity than book-oriented (only one book is recommended for reading aloud in each script), but they are packed with suggestions for participatory play. The included CD features the authors performing more than a dozen songs they wrote to accompany their programs; the melody lines are simple and clear, and the voices are unintimidating. While the format promoted will not be new to seasoned practitioners, the authors' well-organized approach and clear explanations will make this title useful for novice program givers, and even old hands may be inspired to pick and choose some new tricks. JMD

MARCUS, LEONARD S. *Storied City: A Children's Book Walking Tour Guide to New York City*. Dutton, 2003 [144p] illus. with photographs

ISBN 0-525-46924-9 \$12.99

Reviewed from galleys

In this slim volume, children's book editor and critic Marcus provides an assortment of walking tours of New York City, organized by neighborhoods from Lower Manhattan to the Upper West Side to the boroughs. The tours are historical as well as geographical, giving concise and precise traveling directions and mentioning a good mix of juvenile fiction and nonfiction related to each area. The itineraries not only discuss children's books and their New York City locales but also mention museums and architectural and historical landmarks (even giving addresses, phone numbers, hours, and websites where available). Black-and-white photos, maps, and illustrations and quotes from relevant books are interspersed throughout. The author is a conversational and authoritative tour guide whose patter includes tasty bites of author and illustrator biographical trivia, as well as bits of the city's history and culture. Information about additional titles are boxed and framed in checkered borders like checkered cabs. Underlying all of Marcus' savvy stuff, readers will almost hear him humming "New York, New York, it's a wonderful town," and from the Bronx to the Battery he knows the books to prove it. Bibliographies and an index will appear in the bound book. JMD

SUBJECT AND USE INDEX

Keyed to *The Bulletin's* alphabetical arrangement by author, this index, which appears in each issue, can be used in three ways. Entries in regular type refer to subjects; entries in **bold type** refer to curricular or other uses; entries in ALL-CAPS refer to genres and appeals. In the case of subject headings, the subhead "stories" refers to books for the readaloud audience; "fiction," to those books intended for independent reading.

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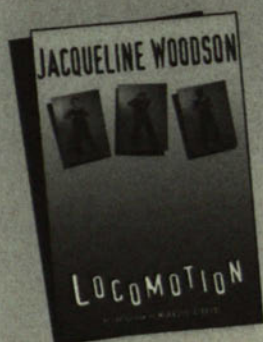
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